DON'T MISS THE STORY ON PAGE 27.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 392. FOR WEEK ENDING JULY 4TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

BE SURE TO CUT

IT OUT

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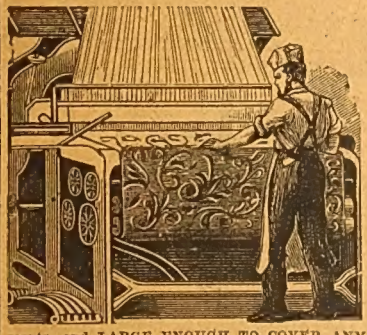

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No. 27

July 4, 1896.

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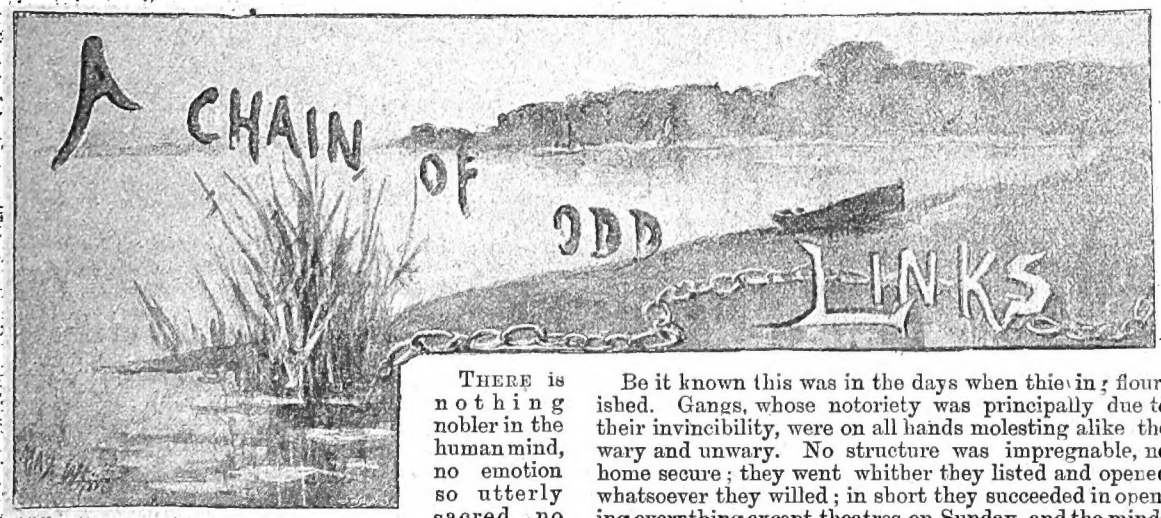

THERE is nothing nobler in the human mind, no emotion so utterly sacred, no spirit beyond the confines of Heaven so truly divine, as that of self-sacrifice.

It is not inception, nor anything else bearing a name; it is one of those invincible proofs striving to force in mankind a recognition of its own brotherhood, through the medium of some great unknown.

It was in the days when my mad hungering heart denied access to the palliating influences of mind. It was while I was ambling through the world with neither object nor care. I knew no hope, no despair, no joy, no woe. I was in that imperial state of indifference when a man would just as soon live as die, or vice-versa. I was like a king in an unpeopled kingdom. Owing to a lack of education and depth of thought, I was superbly ignorant of myself. I had passed many semi-utilitarian epochs, such as newsvending, viâ pick-pocketing and Salvationism, to histrionic performances on provincial stages.

The experience gained in this latter avocation opened my mind to a perception of beautiful realms corrupted. I saw minds of might stranded and rolling upon the scorial shores of passion, and my own mind sickened at the sight.

About this time a legacy enabled me to escape this atmosphere of dishonest vice—dishonest because half concealed—and contemplate with well measured concern vices committed honestly and openly. This recreation projected upon my mind a scheme of vast moral reform, in pursuance of which I frequented gaming hells and slums, and dens of depravity.

Closely thereby hangs my tale.

One night when everybody in the land—properly excepting myself—seemed exceptionally wicked, I was disconsolately meandering amongst the ill-omened slums above mentioned.

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Be it known this was in the days when thieving flourished. Gangs, whose notoriety was principally due to their invincibility, were on all hands molesting alike the wary and unwary. No structure was impregnable, no home secure; they went whither they listed and opened whatsoever they willed; in short they succeeded in opening everything except theatres on Sunday, and the minds of Local Protection authorities. They opened the purses of uncharitable millionaires, they opened wonderment and fear, and probably—if not too luxuriously inclined to spendthriftness—banking accounts.

One particular gang proclaimed itself particularly successful in this way. This was a society of young ladies, so neat and tender in their cunning, as almost to inspire belief that their predatory usages were all on behalf of the "starving poor."

Wending my melancholy way I was thinking of all these things when I found myself quickly contracting a most profound interest in them, and I imagined into shape a new inroad for my great moral reform schemes.

Consequently I bent my head and my thoughts at the same time, and ploughed the road assiduously.

In this manner was I engaged when a jerk in the region of my vest, suggested the possibility of my effects being in danger. Groping hurriedly, I caught a hand closing over my watch. With the hand still disengaged, I examined my person, and found my purse already gone. Turning to my uninvited retainer I found her to be a woman.

After a momentary pause I asked—quite dispassionately:

"What are you doing?"

"You seem to have found out," she returned; and I was struck with the rich beauty of her voice. Her tones implied no coarse defiance, neither did they betray any fear.

Vaguely realising her remark was in some way conclusive, but still feeling a deep interest, I cast about for something to say next. At length I succeeded.

It was—"What shall we do?" It seemed rather irrelevant, but I did not mind so long as I said something

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"I suppose you're going to lock me up, aren't you?"

Disregarding this suggestion entirely, I asked: "Whatever made you do it? Do you want money badly?"

"*I* don't," she returned with earnest emphasis on the pronoun, "but others do, and it is my mission to help them."

My mystification grew, and releasing her wrist, I asked her to follow me to the light of a near street lamp. When we both were beneath its full glow, I scrutinised her intently, with a rudeness ruder than her designs on my property had been. The inspection filled me with wonder. She looked a mere child—a veritable baby, I thought—and truly her face bore an expression of pensive divinity. In fact I was so amazed, that at that moment, slight as she was, she could have knocked me down and plundered me had she so wished, without any fear whatever.

"Forgive me, sir, I did not know you."

With slowly subsiding surprise, and accumulating interest I cried:

"Heaven above, child, you should not have attempted that; why did you not ask me for help? Don't you know your own——"

Here I abruptly stopped, fearing she might misconstrue the intent of my compliment.

"Forgive me, sir, I did not know you," she rejoined; and the glistening pleading of her eyes found a direct and tumultuous response in the rugged depths of my emotion. A lump of choking tears rose in my throat as in a half fever I gulped:

"Here, take it, little one, take it all!" And straightway upon this I proceeded to divest myself of every valuable I had about me. I pressed her to receive them, for I was beside myself with compassion for this strange misplaced little creature.

"No, no," she hurried to rejoin. "I cannot take it now. Here is the purse I stole—take it back please—take it." She faltered a moment, and then in a voice of perfect pain sobbed:

"God help me, whom have I tried to rob."

In the true fulness of my heart I answered:

"Someone less deserving than yourself, child. Don't, little one, don't grieve any more; your tears unman me."

Hastily turning I wiped one, of my personal conception, away. I struck it away, half in shame.

Her tiny hand fell within mine, but I dared not press it, lest it should vanish.

"Forgive me," she said. "Forgive me and let me go. May your goodness turn to your own reward. Forgive me, sir, and let me go." Upon which she moved as though to depart. I started. Let her go?—this tiny, heavenly little thing with hair like bronze hyacinths, this mite of perfect purity, rusting on a mound of vice? Let her go—how could I?

"Who *are* these people you work for?" I questioned at last, with half-shaped indignation.

"My blind husband and his son!"

I started again, exclaiming:

"*Your* son?"

"No, one by his first wife."

"Can I see them?" I next asked her.

"Yes, come with me."

Started on our way, I requested her, with as much considerate reticence as the circumstances permitted, to tell me her history: and these are the words in which she gave it.

Readers will notice she commenced with: "When quite a tiny child." I laughed at this consumedly, but she didn't mind.

"When quite a tiny child," she began, "I had strayed far away amongst the northern hills and sullen lakes. I had no home that I knew of, and in all truth I was a waif.

"This night was peculiarly dark, but yet I had no fear. I knew there to be danger all about me, but I did not care. I only strayed on and on, very hungry and very cold.

"Between two low ranges of hills, deep in the valley, a black river lay, stagnant and still. On either side it was embanked with tall green weeds, seeming to have a wonderful fascination for me. People used to say I was a strange child, and I believe I must have been, because some folks said I was mad.

"Well, I was standing by the edge of this river wondering. I wondered why it was really so black and nasty, and yet so lovely to me. Once or twice I felt I wanted to throw myself in and never come out again, but I didn't do so, as you see.

"Walking on a little way, I came to a place where the bank rose high. I stood on the extreme edge to see the picture of myself in the water below. I was so engaged when a wild duck flew shrieking from amongst the weeds, startling me, and giving me a very hard knock. In a second I lost my footing, overbalanced, and fell splashing into the water.

"I wasn't frightened, that I remember, but I knew no more until I found myself in a little hut with my present husband and his wife standing over me. He had saved me, and I was grateful, so far as I knew how.

"The accident had no ill effect upon me, but it had upon the man who had risked his life for me.

"From that day his sight gradually faded, until he eventually became quite blind. On the same day, his wife, who had been a mother to me, died in giving birth to a son.

"The doctor said my saviour's blindness was entirely due to the immersion, and just imagine how I blamed myself."

I could not imagine why she did blame herself, and I made intimation to that effect. Although she was speaking without emotion, and afterwards silently heard my attempts at her justification, I saw she meant what she said and continued to blame herself accordingly. The thread of her story was resumed.

"This calamity took from him all means of subsistence, between which and his wife's death his life became little better than a blank. But I remembered his goodness

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to me, and did all in my power to comfort him. He was genuinely appreciative, and although when he asked me to marry him I was greatly surprised, I did so from pure gratitude and—and, well because I did not love anyone else. But matters all went sadly; we found it hard to live, and so we came here. He earns a little by playing a harmonium, and I—well you know all about that, sir. Circumstances have forced me in league with others of the same set, and they help us when business is bad. I am not expert, but I have never been caught till now. It seems like an intervention of fate; I mean that my first—well that you should have been so good and forgiving. I hate doing it—hate it, but think of all he has done for me and the gratitude I owe him. Think of it."

She stopped, and I saw the glistening tears falling down her cheeks. Oh, how I pitied her! pitied her with a depth of sadness, deeper than the mysteries of the stars.

"But this son of his?" I queried. "Can he do nothing?"

"Nothing at all. He's undersized—a dwarf, and only half-witted; so I work for them both."

Thereupon I was about to make some speculative remark—or more probably, a fool of myself—when my companion intimated we had reached our destination. As we traversed the cramped back entrance of an isolated house, we were immediately greeted with a weird dreamy melody, floating sadly on the sullen air. It was one of those expressive tunes, enabling a man to conjure in one vast array all the phantoms of a morbid imagination. The strangest of earthly emotion fell through the mesh of those sobbing tones.

"Don't want one," rejoined the man ungraciously.

As my guide opened the door of the chamber from whence the music proceeded it suddenly stopped, and the performer addressed the entering souls, in accents which must have delighted the very deuce, making him, or it, drunk with anticipation.

I looked around me. The cold barrenness of the room suggested itself as an ugly relation to the ugliest aspect of a haunted house—forsaken alike of God and man.

I looked again when these sensitising influences had prepared me for improving stages of development.

The man behind the instrument seemed somehow to express a mute but perfect conception of a better world than this for his own especial delectation. Had it not been for his scalding opprobriums upon our entrance, I might have liked him. He was new and novel. His face was pale, his eyes closed, and a rich, unkempt fibre bristled about his lips, chin, and neck.

His raiment was poor—a condition evident in everything material about him.

Recumbent upon a ragged coat in one corner of the room was the dwarf half-wit. His skin was yellow and his forehead receding, but admitting phrenology's capability of truth, this creature should have been of constant purpose and benevolence.

"I have brought a visitor," said my companion by way of introduction.

"Don't want one," rejoined the man ungraciously.

"But he's a friend," the woman persisted.

"I'd rather you brought an enemy," rejoined the man again, still more ungraciously.

I nearly groaned, but with a manly and commendable effort recovered myself sufficiently to say:

"Yes, I'm a friend. I want to help you. I want to stop this——" I hesitated.

"Well?" said the man. "What next?"

"Your little wife here——" But before I completed the phrase, his exuberant petulance made such a raid on his feelings that he was compelled to strike a discordant groan from the instrument, which probably was more expressive and less harsh than my word might have been.

That there is anything reassuring about my voice I am not aware, but in a strange way the man's demeanour grew cautiously trustful.

"To wish to do good by humanity," said he, "proclaims the inveterate foolishness of wisdom; and to *do* good, argues an unhealthy lack of selfishness."

"But look at my motive!" I urged in my unsullied innocence.

"You mean look at my wife," he replied; and then a deep silence fell, broken only by the snoring of the half-wit. Presently the blind man ground another and harsher discord from the vitals of his harmonium and called out:

"Judas!" Then turning to me he said:

"We called him Judas, because he betrayed his mother unto Death."

The boy so addressed sprang up, bending a filmy eye upon me.

"Is this person a traitor, Judas—can you tell?"

The boy scanned me from toe to crown slowly, closed his eyes, and as slowly opened them again, saying in a low, soft voice:

"No; he is true."

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I am essentially a man of first impressions, and from that moment I liked the boy. Furthermore, I saw in him a power by which his blind father might be swayed, and I blessed him accordingly.

The man arising, took my hand and pressed it. In fact, the trio took my hands between them, each pressing their portion. Having cautiously felt my way I broached the subject which, through the fulness of my own nature, and my interest in the woman, had spontaneously sprung upon my mind a new birth.

I told them I was a lone strange man for whom life had no consuming interest—that I was rich but without a call to do good. Would they please press my heart as they had done my hand? Would they pardon me and receive my help? They must not feel hurt, but weigh my words in a true measure. Would they help me to a useful life?—live upon me as a favour to myself? They would—yes—I felt assured they would; and as a result of my earnest solicitations they did. Consequently, in a very little while I had them established with me, a trinity of useful souls and interests.

Judas, the half-wit, entered.

CHAPTER II.

A glorious golden summer beamed and languished, giving sufficient warmth to last us during the spell of its burial and resurrection. We kept beyond the spiky pale of the world, benignly pitying alike its urbanity and vice. A rose ridden cottage, with a sea of summer flowers surrounding, held us and our secrets aloof from all outlying distraction. Our futures were like the dim blue hills in the distance—buried in haze, but withal, enticing.

Looking back, I can see even now in my mind's eye the best radiance of all; the tiny woman laving so to speak in the sleepy ocean of garden flowers.

She seemed like a rarely beautiful giant lily, animated with breath of the Divine to tell the earth of an unknown Heaven. She ever appeared to me—as she had upon my first beholding her—as a baby angel.

I thought of her—I dreamt of her—I loved her. My whole life became absorbed in her happiness. From my mind—she called it a kingdom—I fashioned forth heavens, with her like upon each throne. Many were the conversations in which I betrayed these visioned realms. Day after day would we together glorify these continued dreams, until I at length discovered that in the respect as she was indispensable to me so was I to her. At this consummation I trembled—why, I cannot say. I loved her, 'tis true; but I loved her quite innocently. I loved her as a child—an ambition. I loved her with the strength of sunfire, sucking dry the bosom of the desert, and I trembled at my own power.

Despite this passion, however, this all abandoning love, I always remembered my duty to the others—father and son. We—the quartette complete—spent long hours together, happily talking and discussing, and sometimes listening whilst the blind man played.

In my favour, but next to the beautiful woman, the half-witted boy held position.

The rooms I had chosen for my own use were at the top of the cottage, so that I could sit and watch—watch and with my eyes devour—the woman, as she lingered among the roses.

I used to see her burst upon the rose-decked lattice, like a new Parnassus, where all the Muses sat.

Here, by my window, the boy would often join me, and we would sit and watch together, mutely drinking her loveliness. A strange wild fire would leap into the dwarf's expressionless eyes, whenever they lighted on her, his father's wife. I could not understand it, and feared it consequently. His eyes, so generally lustreless, seemed on these occasions to absorb all surrounding light, so much so as to render me for the time being unconscious of almost everything save themselves.

With the one propitious circumstance, the occurrence was invariable. Their blazing radiance, portentously blended itself with my ever-present fancy of the woman. Their fire swarmed about me, and yet I could prevision no disaster.

One unusually sombre night a little before Eastertide, when I thought all except myself had retired, I was sitting reading, as was my wont. The fire burnt freely, but the lamp had burned dim. At the first weak flutter of its dying flame I put down my book and lay back, placidly musing. Fancy took his flight, and my senses were just about to succumb to their own lethargic influences when I was aroused by a knock at my chamber door.

"Come in!" I said, startled and surprised.

Judas, the half-wit, entered. In the spectral dancing of the fire flame his face appeared ashen and grey, and its yellow parchment skin was more than usually roughly drawn. I saw he wore a dressing-gown, as though he had recently and hurriedly left his bed.

I almost shuddered as I looked. Although his eyes were, as usual, half closed, something told me the sometime mystery in their depths had deepened.

He sat down, paused, and then spoke.

"We are on the eve of the Crucifixion, aren't we? That's when the Master died to save the thing He loved; the world that is—the world which didn't love Him in return. Never mind, He died all the same. No sacrifice was too great, or had a second consideration. He humbled Himself, denied Himself, became worldly, and because people whom He loved wouldn't die for His sake, well He died for theirs. Judas betrayed Him and *he* died too—repentant, I believe. Never mind!"

He paused, and in that moment I felt a revelation was about to burst upon me. His eyes opened vacantly, and as he resumed, his voice sank lower than ever, containing a strange, sweet ring.

"Father's a poor useless man," he began; and for my life I could not then have denied him the belief.

"Yes, a poor weak man, and very much in the way of other's happiness. His wife's a very wonderful—a beautiful and wonderful woman—almost an angel. She is

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good, and deserving of happiness. But I say, how *can* she be happy with father or—or me? You are fairly good, and with good influences might be useful to God's world. Tell me, is it wrong to love when you can't help it—no matter where you put your love? Tell me that."

I felt his eyes, the sight of his soul going through me, and a painful blush sprang from my heart, suffusing my face as I answered:

"I don't know!" my head drooped.

"You say you don't know, well, I should say not. Who can help themselves?—never mind."

He paused again, and a look of genuine emotion lit the icy hardness of his face.

"Who can help loving my father's wife?" he asked. "Not me, not you, nor yet the angels who envy her. The world she loves, therein she should rightly reign; and that world is not my heart, nor my father's heart, nor the world of weary gratitude! None of these."

I was stung to the quick. I was mad. I spoke but cannot now remember my words.

Gasping with fear, awe, and sinful expectation, I sank back again. The long restrained burden of my love had made me capable of Hells.

"Gratitude," he continued, "dies on the threshold of love. Now listen—listen well. Would you like to be alone with—with——?"

I sprang up with a rasping moan. I shrieked: "Your father, boy, your father! Think—he lives!"

"He might die!" rejoined the boy measuredly.

"God! no, no, no! not that," I shrieked again.

"Why not? What sacrifice is too great?" said he.

The blood leapt to my head like beads of molten lead. I sweated and quaked—I groaned.

The boy knew me; he saw as clearly as the scintillant stars; this knowledge encompassed my whole being. I dared not answer him. I dared not stay him. I dared not consent. I was dead to all save fear and love—my consuming love for the woman. His next words I remember only as a fantastic dream, thrust within the chaos of latent reason.

"You are not well—you shiver and yet will not die. You *will* not die—will not; that I *know*. You are not meant to die, and yet somebody *has* to die. The only way to diet an infant is to tempt with various things, and mark the one chosen. Everything earthy is an infant—an infant of Nature's. Rivers are infants and require feeding, and should they vomit afterwards you must change the food."

I was conscious of another pause here, during which a vague understanding of his meaning bent my thoughts.

Continuing he said:

"This is the eve of the great world romance. The eve of Death, of Burial, and of Resurrection. Such death was at once encompassing, and self encompassed, and yet not sinful. I must remember that, must think of it, and remember. I have power and resource. The blind man depends on me, and is the mere breath of my nostrils.

"Rivers like human food. Sometimes they vomit, and sometimes they devour. You are unwell. Never mind, you will recover!"

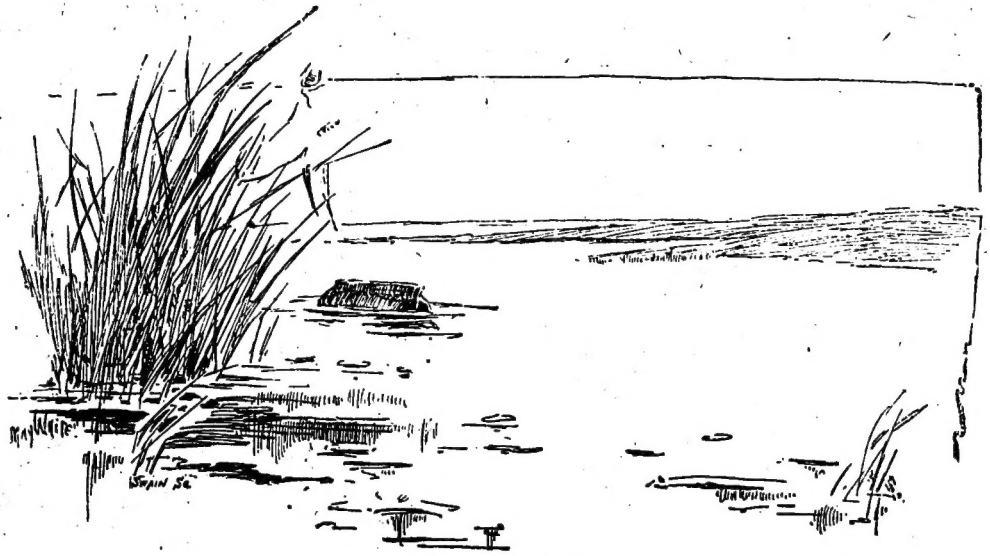
Recalling in the extremity of all horror this significant scene again with its gall and inhuman delight, I remember him drawing from his vest a red rose. He kissed it first, then flung it upon the floor, mutilating it beyond recognition. It was one *she* had given him.

* * * * *

Shortly after midday on the day of All Holiness, the boy Judas rowed his blind father far down the silver stream. The gathering treachery burst. The poor old man bent his head, ploughed the seared furrows of his eyes, and then shrieked and shrieked again.

With a sudden turn the boat capsized, and an hour afterwards two stark bodies threaded their way through the nausea of weed, scum, and bubble, down to the raging sea.

DUNSTAN DENU.



Down to the raging sea.

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A WOMAN'S RING.

"I suppose it must go; there is no help for it." Her voice choked a little as she spoke the words, and her long, slim fingers trembled as they came in contact with the little gold hoop with the single brilliant in it. There was a quivering of her pale lips, too, and just the semblance of a tear glistened in the corner of her eye. But it was there only a moment. With a hasty and impatient movement, as if angry with herself at having given way to the sudden weakness, she brushed the tiny drop away and forced a laugh, harsh and unreal.

"Poor old Jack; I wonder where *you* are now. In your grave or out of it?"

And she fell into another reverie, slipping the ring on her finger, and letting the dull light flash and glitter on the lovely diamond.

Three years ago Jack had given it to her; the date was stamped on her memory. She had forgotten thousands of other things far more inportant, but she remembered that lovely evening in August when they drifted together down the river. The sky was red with the setting sun, and the calm water looked like blood beneath the crimson clouds. They had had a jolly day, a day never to be forgotten, a day of joy and happiness to them both.

In the sweet solitude there had been no one to disturb them, and they had landed on a little island. Lost in the leafy shadows, they watched the sun vanish and night give place to day. And when she got home, weary, but palpitating with the recollection of the day and of the evening, she found the ring on her finger. Jack had slipped it on as she lay in his arms—perhaps it wasn't right, but how could she, a poor weak woman, help herself?—besides, Jack had promised to marry her when he came back, so what did it matter?

In a week Jack had gone, called away on foreign service, and from that day, when they parted at the railway station, and the train rolled out of the station, to the waving of handkerchiefs and "The Girl I Left Behind Me," she had never received so much as a line from him.

Her letters, too, were returned marked "Not known." At first she gave way to passionate fits of tears, but growing calmer, she resigned herself, a something telling her that she had muddled the address, and that he would come back to her and fulfil his pledge some day. This calmed her, and became her one fixed idea.

And so three years slipped away; many things happened, and still she cherished the little gold circle with the great glittering stone in it, even though scores of little treasures dear to her with a great and tender remembrance had gone to the pawnbroker.

That is how she was situated. She had been out of an engagement for close upon a twelvemonth; no one would have her; the agents shook their heads when she called upon them. She had grown tired of their silly grins and repulsive familiarities, and she had given up calling and resigned herself to her fate.

And yet she could dance and sing, had a picturesque little face, and rounded limbs. There were plenty of girls on the stage who had neither, and yet fortune smiled on them and managers paid them big salaries. And the agents spoke of them quite respectfully, and had their photographs pinned all over their walls. It was hard luck, that it was, nothing more or less.

However, there was no good fighting against it. One must live, and there was only one way to do it. At least, there were other ways, but Nellie had always kept straight. She felt that she should hear from Jack one day, and she didn't mean to do as other girls had done.

So one by one her little trinkets and trifles vanished into the pawnbrokers' shops, and now nothing remained but Jack's ring. And over that she cried; it gave her a wrench to part with it. Still it must go; it would keep her alive for a long time to come, and life was worth more than silly sentiment.

Besides, in a week or two managers would be filling up their vacancies for the pantomimes, and there was always a chance for her. But it was silly wasting time in this way. She would put on her hat and coat, and slip round to old Emanuel's at once. If she hesitated much longer, her courage might fail her altogether, and the ring be locked up again, in its covering of tissue paper. That would be stupid.

Old Martin, her landlady, was crying out for her rent. And there was nothing to eat in the house, and she was ravenous. It was no earthly good starving, that wouldn't get her an engagement, at least, not in this world. And an engagement in the next wouldn't be of much use.

So she popped on her hat and coat, and put on her gloves, wondering the while what that old skinflint, Emanuel, would give on it. The aged one was in a good humour; in fact, quite genial, and handed over quite a handful of glittering, clinking, musical sovereigns.

* * * * *

"You'll be a fool to return it." Susie jerked out the words with spiteful emphasis. "If you don't want the thing, do as I do."

"What's that?" Nellie asked innocently.

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"Take it to the people it came from—you'll find their names just inside the case—and ask them how much was paid for it. When they tell you, offer to sell it 'em back at a reduction. They'll take it like a shot, for, don't you see, they'll make two profits and yet have the things to sell again. That's what I do with half the things left at the stage door for me. I don't want them; the money's far more useful, I can assure you, and if you're not a fool you'll do the same."

It was a pretty enough little bracelet, attached by a blue ribbon to a visiting card bearing a name and a few lines scribbled in pencil: "Will Miss Daltry honour an ardent admirer of her talents and beauty by accepting this trifle, and may he hope to be granted the pleasure of her company at supper to-morrow evening?"

Nellie didn't know who the ardent admirer was, nor did she possess any desire to make his acquaintance. The note could be left to take care of itself, but the bracelet—what was to be done with it? Susie's advice was practical, and early the following morning she did not hesitate to carry it out.

They gave her fifteen guineas for it, about half its real value, Susie said. But she didn't care if she had been swindled. All she wanted the money for was to get Jack's ring out of pawn, and fifteen guineas would do that easily, and leave a bit over. "Jack's ring, Jack's ring;" even the passers-by in the street seemed to be shouting the words in her ear, and the very cabs and omnibuses rumbled it out as they ploughed through the mud.

With a light heart Nellie rushed to the theatre. There was a "call" for rehearsal of the chorus, some new business was to be introduced, and all day long the girls hung about the cold and draughty stage whilst the stage-manager and the author squabbled about this, that, and the other. After the evening performance Nellie crawled home, weary and shivering. It was too late to get Jack's ring out of pawn; she would make that her first business the next morning. It would be quite like old times to have it back again. Yes, just like old times.

* * * * *

"She's in a state of high fever," said the doctor, as he felt Nellie's burning wrist, "and you mustn't let her move on any account."

For days she tossed on her hard little iron bedstead, muttering deliriously about a ring and calling upon some one, vaguely named Jack, to marry her, and take her away from her solitude, misery, pinching, and screwing, and temptation. Poor old Martha didn't know what she meant, and she didn't trouble to find out as long as the fifteen guineas lasted out.

Regularly each week she helped herself to the little store, and when the last sovereign melted away, Nellie, as thin as a lath and as shaky as a blade of grass blown by the wind, began to sit up and to smile in her old way at the doctor when he said she was pulling through all right, and would be well and strong in a week or two. Then the good Martha began to ask her when and how a fresh supply of the needful would be forthcoming.

Nellie listened listlessly to her grumblings and growlings; the doctor's warning that she was not to attempt to return to her old pursuit affected her more keenly. What was she to do? She had no money, everything of value was pawned, and Jack's ring had not yet been redeemed. That worried her more than anything else. Suppose he was to return suddenly and to find that she had parted with his gift? What would he say?

The thought haunted her night and day, but it gave her strength to grow well again. She was determined to get that ring back again somehow. She accepted an engagement at an East-end music-hall—anything was better than idly lounging about—and danced and sang her heart out.

Every week she put a trifle by, and each Saturday she opened the little tin money-box and counted out the sixpences and shillings. She might have filled the box with sovereigns a dozen times over if she had accepted only a few of the invitations that were showered upon her; but whenever she felt weak and tired of the dull grind she kissed Jack's photograph, and comforted herself with the thought that he would return directly and carry out what he had promised, and they would go away from the hateful scenes and associations for ever.

* * * * *

It took a long time to save up the right amount, but in time it was got together, and with a beating heart Nellie rushed to Emanuel's.

"Diamond ring, miss? Oh, yes, I remember. Ticket ran out a long time ago and it's been sold."

"Sold!"

"Yes, miss, sold last night, strange to say. Who bought that diamond ring, Isaacs?" He called out to his assistant. "Wasn't it a gent with a fair moustache?"

"Yes. Said he'd come from Africa or somewhere."

Nellie staggered from the shop, weak and helpless. It was raining heavily, and a cutting east wind tore down the streets. But heedless of both she wandered about crying softly, and clutching the worn leather purse in which lay her little store of silver, so carefully gathered. It was all of no use now; time and energy had alike been wasted.

She went home and flung herself on her bed just as she was, in her wet and mud-splashed things, and cried herself to sleep.

Presently she awoke. The opening of the door had disturbed her, and she raised her swollen eyelids slowly and languidly. Then she was conscious of a man's face peering into her own, of a man's arms round her, and of a man's lips pressed to her hot, dry lips.

"I have found you at last, little one," said a voice softly, as in a dream. It was the voice of Jack that she heard dimly and distantly. "Yes, I've found you at last. The ring did it. I saw it in a shop window, and the man told me your address. It was only last night, dear, and here I am, and here is the ring again, and neither of us three will ever be parted again."

The sound of his voice was music in her ears. Her throat was too hot and dry to speak, and her tongue refused to move, it was so swollen and heavy. She simply lay there looking at his dear old face, bronzed and anxious, but not changed one whit since that day on the river. She tried hard to speak, but it was useless; an iron hand gripped her throat and slowly choked the life out of her.

She felt him slip the ring on her finger; and with an effort she raised her hand—how heavy it was—! to her lips and kissed the cold, glittering stone. Then a mist came across her eyes; she sighed once—it was a sigh of quiet happiness—and her head sank back on the pillow.

And outside the rain beat pitilessly against the window-pane, and old Martha fidgeted in the hall for the rent that was three weeks overdue.

M. M.

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The Coiners:

AN ADVENTURE IN BIRMINGHAM.

I.

During the year 1860 London was flooded with counterfeit coin. It was so well manufactured that it passed readily. The evil at last became so great the authorities requested that a skilful detective might be sent to ferret out the nest of coiners. I was fixed upon to perform that duty.

I had nothing to guide me. The fact, however, that Birmingham was the city where the counterfeit coin was most abundant, led me to suspect that the manufactory might be somewhere within its limits. It was, therefore, to the capital of the Midlands that I first proceeded. I spent five weeks in that city without gaining the slightest clue to the counterfeiters.

I began to grow discouraged, and really thought I should be obliged to return home without having achieved any result. One day I received a letter from my wife requesting that I would send her some money, as she was out of funds. I went into a bank and asked for a cheque, at the same time handing a sum of money to pay for it, in which there were several half sovereigns. The clerk pushed three of the half sovereigns back to me.

"Counterfeit," he said.

"What!" said I, "do you mean to tell me those half sovereigns are counterfeit?"

"I do."

"Are you certain?"

"Perfectly certain. They are remarkably well executed, but they are deficient in weight. See for yourself."

And he placed one of them in the scales against a genuine half sovereign on the other side. The latter weighed down the former.

"That is the best executed counterfeit coin I ever saw in my life," I exclaimed, examining it very closely. "Is all the counterfeit money in circulation here of the same character as this?"

"Oh, dear no," replied the clerk; "it is not nearly so well done. These are the work of Ned Wilson, the famous counterfeiter. I know it well, for I have handled a great deal of it in my time. Here is some of the money that is in circulation here," he added, taking several half-sovereigns from a drawer. "You see, the milling is not nearly so perfect as Ned Wilson's, although it is pretty well done, too."

I compared the two together and found that he was right. I supplied the place of the three counterfeit half-sovereigns with good coin, and returned the former to my pocket again.

A few days after this I received information which caused me to take a journey to a village situated about thirty miles from Birmingham. I arrived there at night, and took up my quarters at the only tavern in the place. It was a wretched dwelling, and kept by an old man and woman, the surliest couple, I think, it has ever been my lot to meet. In answer to my inquiry as to whether I could have lodgings there for the night, I noticed that the host gave a peculiar look at his wife, and after some whispering I was informed in the most ungracious manner possible that I could have a bed.

I have frequently in the course of my life been obliged to put up with wretched accommodation, so I did not allow my equanimity of temper to be destroyed by the miserable fare set before me, and the still more miserable sleeping apartment into which I was ushered after I had concluded my repast.

The chamber was small in size, and was certainly well ventilated, for I could see the stars peeping through the roof. The bed was simply a bag of straw thrown into one corner of the room, without sheets or covering of any kind. This last fact however was not of much consequence, as it was summer-time and oppressively hot.

I stood for more than an hour gazing out of the opening which served for a window. Before me was spread an immense landscape, the limits of which I could not see. The tavern in which I had taken up my abode appeared to be isolated from all other dwellings, and save the cry of an owl and the hum of a moth on the window-pane, not a sound reached my ears. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and so bright that I could have seen to read the smallest print.

At last I began to grow weary, and, throwing myself on my pallet, I was soon in a deep slumber. How long I slept I know not, but I was awakened by a dull sound, which resembled someone hammering in the distance. I suppose it was the peculiarity of the sound which awoke me, for it was by no means loud, but conveyed to me the idea of someone striking iron with a muffled hammer. I rose from my bed and went to the window. The moon was low in the western horizon, by which fact I knew that it must be near morning. The sound I have referred to reached me more distinctly than when in the back part of the chamber. It appeared to come from some out-houses which were situated about a hundred yards from the inn.

Now, I am naturally of an inquiring mind, and this sound, occurring as it did in the middle of the night, in such a remote, out-of-the-way place, piqued my curiosity, and I felt an irresistible desire to go out and discover the cause of it. This desire, as the sound continued, grew upon me with such intensity that I resolved to gratify it at any price.

I put on my boots, the only articles of attire I had discarded, and cautiously opening the door of my chamber, noiselessly descended the rickety staircase. A few steps brought me into the lower apartment, which I found entirely deserted. I crept quietly to the door, and, unfastening it without making the slightest noise, was soon in the moonlight.

Not a soul was visible, but the sound still continued, and grew more distinct as I approached the place whence it proceeded. At last I found myself before a long, low building, through the crevices of which I could perceive a lurid glare issuing. I stooped down and peered through the keyhole, and, to my extreme

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surprise, I saw half-a-dozen strong looking men, with their coats and sleeves turned up, engaged in a variety of strange occupations. Some were working at a forge, others were superintending the casting of moulds, and some were engaged in the process of milling coin. In a moment the whole truth burst upon me. Here was the gang of counterfeiters I was in search of, and the landlord and his wife evidently belonged to the same band, for in one corner I perceived them employed, the man polishing some old half-sovereign pieces just turned from the moulds, while the woman was packing the finished coins into rolls.

II.

I had seen enough, and was about to return to my apartment again when suddenly I felt a heavy hand placed on my shoulder, and, turning my head round, to my horror found myself in the grasp of as ill-looking a scoundrel as ever escaped the gallows.

"What are you doing here, my good fellow?" he exclaimed in a gruff voice, giving me a shake.

"Taking a stroll by moonlight," I replied, endeavouring to maintain my presence of mind.

"Well, perhaps you'll just take a stroll in here, will you?" returned the ruffian, pushing open the door, and dragging me in after him.

All the inmates of the barn immediately stopped work, and rushed towards us when they saw me.

"Why, what's this?" they all exclaimed.

"A loafer I found peeping outside," said the man who had captured me.

"He's a traveller that came to the tavern to-night and asked for lodgings; the last time I saw him he was safe in bed," said the landlord.

The men withdrew to a corner of the apartment, leaving one to keep guard over me. I soon saw they were in earnest consultation, and they were evidently debating some important question. The man keeping guard over me said nothing, but scowled fiercely. I had not uttered a single word during the time I had been in the barn. I was aware that whatever I might say would in all probability only do more harm than good, and it has always been a maxim of mine to hold my tongue when in doubt. At last the discussion seemed to be settled, for the blackest and dirtiest of the whole came forward, and, without any introduction, exclaimed:

"I say, my man, look here—you must die!"

I did not move a muscle, nor utter a word.

"You have found our secret, and dead men tell no tales."

I was still silent.

"We give you ten minutes to say your prayers, and also allow you the privilege of saying whether you will be hanged or shot."

Suddenly an idea struck me. I remembered something that might save my life. I burst into a violent fit of laughter—in fact it was hysterical, but they did not know that. They looked from one to the other in the greatest amazement.

"Well, he takes it mighty cool," said one.

"I suppose he doesn't know we are in earnest," said another.

"Come, come! you had better say your prayers," said the man who had just spoken; "time flies."

My only reply was a fit of laughter more violent than the first.

"The man's mad!" they exclaimed.

"Or drunk," said some.

"Well, boys," I cried, speaking for the first time, "this is the rummest go I ever heard tell on. What! hang a pal?"

"A pal!—you a pal!"

"I ain't nothing else," was my elegant rejoinder.

"What's your name?"

"Did you ever hear of Ned Wilson?" I asked.

"You may be certain of that. Ain't he at the head of our profession?"

"Well, then, I'm Ned Wilson."

"You Ned Wilson!" they all exclaimed.

"You may bet your life on that," I returned, swaggering up to the corner where I had seen the old woman counting and packing the counterfeit half-sovereigns.

Fortune favoured me. None of the men present had ever seen Ned Wilson, although his reputation was well known to them, and my swaggering, insolent manner had somewhat thrown them off their guard, yet I could plainly see that all their doubts were not removed.

"And you call these things well done, do you?" I asked, taking up a handful of the money. "Well, all I can say is that if you can't do better than this, you had better shut up shop, that's all."

"Can't you show us anything better?" asked one of the men.

"I rather think I can. If I couldn't I'd go and hang myself."

"Let's see it," they cried.

This was my last *coup*, and one on which I knew my life depended.

"Lookee here, gentlemen," I exclaimed, taking one of the counterfeit half-sovereigns from my pocket, which had been rejected at the bank. "There's my last job; what do you think of it?"

It was passed from hand to hand, some saying it was no counterfeit at all, others saying that it was.

"How will you prove it is a counterfeit?" asked one of the men.

"By weighing it with a genuine one," I replied.

This plan was immediately adopted, and the character of the coin proved.

"Perhaps he got this by accident," I heard one of the men whisper to another.

"Try these," said I, taking the other two from my pocket.

All their doubts now vanished.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed some. "Splendid!" said others.

When they had examined it to their satisfaction they all of them cordially shook me by the hand, every particle of doubt having vanished from their minds. I carried out my part well. Some questions were occasionally asked me involving some of the technicalities of the businesss. These, however, I avoided by stating that I was on a journey of pleasure, and would much rather drink a glass of whisky than answer questions. The whisky was produced, and we made a night of it, and it was not until morning had dawned that we separated.

The next day I returned to Birmingham, brought down the necessary assistance, and captured the whole gang of counterfeiters in the very act. The den was broke up for ever, and most of them were condemned to serve a term of years in one of Her Majesty's prisons.

I have these counterfeit half-sovereigns still in my possession, and intend never to part with them, for they were certainly the means of saving my life.

H. P. Leggett.

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The Mistake I Made

The little girl was too charming to be resisted. In vain I called to my aid all the gravity and soberness that beseemed my age. In vain I held myself to myself as a person already within the verge of old fogeydom. In vain I propounded and solved elaborate arithmetical problems as to the variable proportions which sixteen would assume to forty at advanced stages of life. I know that last sentence is not correctly expressed, but let it pass. Thus stood the case: Charlotte was sixteen and I forty, and I, more than double Lotty's age—almost old enough to be her respectable papa—I found myself irretrievably enslaved by that young person, and trotting captive at her chariot-wheels—or more properly, the wheels of her infantine go-cart.

I had nursed Lotty, she had ridden a cock-horse upon my knee. I had kissed her moist lips when kissing was a ceremony performed rather for the sake of politeness to mamma than for any pleasantness in itself. I had made Lotty ill with surreptitious sugar plums; I had presented her with Christmas boxes of the most astonishing toys; I had assisted in the instilling of the alphabet into her youthful mind by means of highly coloured pictures in a painful state of alliteration; I had begged Lotty out of the corner, where she stood obstinate, finger in mouth, and with a general humidity of countenance.

I had thought Lotty a dirty child when I saw her paddling with her little fat hands in a puddle, or with traces of lollipops about her innocent mouth. I had execrated Lotty as a nuisance and a bore when she would poke her pug nose into my flirtation with Miss Mirables (who married afterwards Lord Methuselah). And at last it had come to this! We had changed places. I was the child now, and Miss Lotty was mistress over me and she knew it. She threw me a sugar plum when she so pleased; she taught me a letter of some sweet sibilating alphabet when she had nothing better to do; she patronised me, and began to take an interest in my temper and morals; she petted me when she lacked amusement, and when she was otherwise engaged gave me to understand in the plainest manner that I was a consummate bore, and an unmitigated nuisance.

Miss Lotty knew all about it. In vain I tried to treat her as a child. She laughed in my face at the transparent absurdity of the pretence. In vain I affected indifference. She exacted attention, and would not be snubbed. She flirted with small boys for the express purpose of vexing me, and knew that I was vexed, and I knew that she knew it.

In what manner or at what precise time she left off being a child and began to be a woman I do not know. She passed out of the nursery by no sensible transition, and took to her Missdom quite naturally. Juliet of the house of Capulet, brought out by her provident mother at the age of fourteen, did not assume her new honours with a more perfect coolness.

This, then, was the state of the case. I, who had overlived my youthful heart weaknesses, who prided myself on being safe henceforth from the subtlest fascinations of the female sex, fell into captivity at the hands of a little girl just out of the nursery. Having struggled in vain, I succumbed, and began to think seriously whether sixteen and forty were, after all, such incompatible ages. It was not quite a case of January and May. If I had been sixty and a lord, there would have been nothing unusual in the notion. If I had been a widower, and possessed a daughter a little older than Lotty, the match would have been perfectly *en règle*. The difference was on the right side. It was not as bad as if I had married my first love, who was forty when I was sixteen.

So I ceased to compare myself with the small boys with whom Lotty flirted. I turned a blind eye on the budding obesity of my figure, and began to consider the matter as an accomplished fact. Miss Lotty had an aunt—a very respectable person—of mature age. Miss Sims was the name of this lady, and Miss Sims and I had always been great friends. She was a gushing person, strongly sympathetic, and given to the study of the minor poets of the last generation. We had often exchanged sympathies, had often discoursed together on the affections after a diluted platonic manner, and she was accustomed to apply to me for explanations of namby-pamby passages of her favourite poets.

Charlotte was sixteen.

Miss Sims occupied the place in the family which maiden aunts so often fill. To make things generally pleasant, to be a general go-between, the friend of everybody, the deliverer of messages, the arranger of the delicate amenities of social life—such was Miss Sims' mission.

Her age was certainly verg-

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ing towards fifty. She was well preserved; had expressive eyes, hair scrupulously neat, but very thin, white angular hands, faint smile, and a purring sort of voice.

I respected Miss Sims immensely; I had a great friendship for her. The idea struck me that I would make her my confidante with regard to Lotty. She was the very person for a confidante. I could not for the life of me have broken the subject to papa and mamma. Lotty was a child to them still, and I felt that it would scarcely have seemed more ridiculous to them for me to confess a tender passion for the infant in long clothes than to hint the state of my heart towards Lotty. I had determined to make some move, and the aunt appeared to me the very medium through whom to make it. The familiar friend of Lotty, to whom that little maiden confessed all her innocent secrets — the companion and fellow-councillor of Lotty's parents — this aunt was just the confidante I wanted.

Lotty and her mamma were going forth on the business of card-leaving.

But, beyond this, I felt sure that the state of the case had not altogether escaped the sympathetic penetration of Miss Sims. That faint smile of hers, that wistful look in her fine eyes, a playful shake of the head sometimes, the pressure of a kind hand—these signs had not been lost upon me. Often, when my eyes had been following against their will the graceful, buoyant figure of Lotty, they would meet the eyes of Miss Sims; and as I smiled and half blushed at being thus caught, Miss Sims would smile and half blush likewise. Often, when I had been leaning over Lotty at her book, admiring the downward contour of the soft cheek, or the luxuriance of the glossy hair, lifting my eyes, they would again meet Miss Sims' eyes, and Miss Sims would turn her head away with an expression of countenance which spoke volumes.

Once, when I was shaking Miss Sims' hand on departure, I could not restrain myself from whispering: "*Qu'elle est charmante?*" Why I spoke in French I cannot tell. Miss Sims' knowledge of that language was imperfect, while Lotty's exceeded my own—so that it could not have been an aside from Lotty. But such French sentences are generally spoken without there being any satisfactory reason why they should not be uttered in English. However, to my exclamation, Miss Sims had rejoined: "Hush!" with an upraised bony finger, and an arch smile.

In breaking the matter to Lotty's aunt, then, I did not anticipate very much difficulty. She certainly had observed my admiration of her niece; and even had it been otherwise, the ready sympathy of this kind, estimable woman would have interpreted my meaning from a word or look.

I chose my time. I was copying some music for Lotty. Lotty and her mamma were going forth on the business of card-leaving.

As I took them down to the carriage, Lotty said: "You will finish my music?" And she made the prettiest beseeching *moue*, and lifted her face, just as when a child she had lifted it up to be kissed. "We shall soon be back, and you can stay to dinner. You must stay to dinner. The evenings are so dull and stupid, and then you can sing that duet with me. Now, go back and finish the music. You and Aunt Sarah can talk poetry, you know, till I come back."

"Yes, Miss Lotty, I had that very intention of talking poetry with Aunt Sarah—the sweetest poetry in the world—yourself the theme."

Returned to Miss Sims and the music copying, I made a crochet—"Miss Sims," I said—then two semi-quavers and a rest, then three blank bars.

"Miss Sims," I said, "I hope you will not see anything absurd in what I am about to—to—to lay before you," crescendo, written in neat italics.

"My heart——"

"Dear me!" cried Miss Sims.

"My heart, my dear Miss Sims, may be of a soft and foolish texture—yes, texture." (I had screwed myself up to the mark, and chose my language with deliberation.) "It may be soft, I say, but, upon my soul, I do not think it is. I think no man, the most insensate, could have seen daily, as I have seen, this sweet girl" (*con molto spirito*) "and have resisted her attractions. It does not lie within the power of human nature to resist them."

I was silent for a few minutes, and steadily continued my copying. I had determined to discuss the subject in the calmest and most reasonable manner. I confess the dots were scarcely circular, and the strokes scarcely straight, but I completed a most prodigious series of *ad libitum* before I recommenced. I dare not look at Miss Sims.

"That there is disparity in age I cannot deny. Some people would call it a great disparity——"

"Sir!" cried Miss Sims, with some warmth.

"Yes, I am not surprised at that tone. But I feel that I must bring this into prominence, and consider it judicially. I am not a young man. I cannot hide it from myself, even if I would—I am no longer young. Perhaps I have an appearance of age, a gravity, beyond my actual years."

"I think enough has been said on that part of the subject," Miss Sims interrupted me. "You lay too much stress on this point, and must be labouring, I

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think, under some strange misconception. After all, what does age matter—a few months more or less. It is the heart, my dear sir, the heart; the sympathy of affections, the reciprocity of ideas, the congeniality of sentiments——"

"It is like you to say so," I exclaimed. "I appreciate your kindness. We are old friends, Miss Sims——"

The expression on Lotty's face surprised me.

"Friends of long standing," Miss Sims agreed correctively.

"Friends of long standing. I knew that you would understand me. I felt that you were the best person, the only person, to whom I could first break this delicate subject. I knew that you would meet me half way."

"Oh! do not say that," sighed Lotty's aunt.

"You have seen the truth for some time," I went on. "In your eyes, in your smiles, I have read that you have discovered my secret. Woman's insight, the sympathy of a gentle nature—who can disguise such secrets from these? And now, be frank with me. I come to you in my perplexity. Do not pretend to misunderstand me. My tongue is timid. Help me—advise me!"

"Maidenly propriety!" she said, in a low tone.

"Exactly so. Your good sense and instinctive feeling of what is right prompts those words. I anticipated this. But, my dear Miss Sims, I do not wish to make you a conspirator with me. There shall be no secrets. I ask you to confess none to me. All I ask is that, as a friend, you will tell me whether there is any chance for me. You are everybody's friend—do not deprive me alone of your help."

"Really, I do not know what to say," Miss Sims whispered, in a voice greatly agitated.

I had long persevered in my music-copying. I knew that I was making the most astounding blunders, but that was of little consequence. If I left off this accompaniment I felt that my voice would break down too.

"My dear Miss Sims," I went on, "I know that your present hesitation proceeds from the best of motives. Do not think I am flattering you when I say that to your influence I attribute much of the exquisite purity of your charming niece."

This was not quite true, but I saw that a compliment would be well timed.

"She is a good child," said Miss Sims.

"I, too," I went on, "have not been blind to this gradual change, to those unfolding beauties. We are old friends, we have known each other many years. You can forgive—nay, you will sympathise with the warmth of my expressions. This gradual growth of love—what a mystery it is! 'He never loved that loved not at first sight,' says the poet. What a libel upon human nature, worthy of the gross lips that uttered it! True love is always gradual. The first indifference burgeons into liking, flowers into friendship, fruits into love. We know not where indifference ends and love begins."

In the flow of my words I flung aside my pen, and strode to the fireplace by which Miss Sims was sitting. My oratory must have been moving. Miss Sims was in tears when I next came to a pause.

She lifted her tearful eyes for a moment to mine, as I stood upon the hearthrug close by her side.

"Oh, spare me!" she said. "This tumult of feelings—so painful and yet so delicious! I am but a weak, girlish thing" (she giggled hysterically). "Leave me alone now. Some other time—some other time. I have been expecting this. I knew it must come."

"You *had* discovered then," I said. "I knew you had. Long ago, Miss Sims, long ago—did you not?"

"I could not be blind," she said. "Maiden modesty is very innocent; but could I help seeing?"

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "And there is hope for me?"

"What can I say? Do not press me."

"I intreat you. Say, at least, there is not despair."

"No, do not despair," she said. "I do not wish that."

We were silent for a minute or so. Miss Sims spoke first.

"You will speak to my brother!" she said, covering her face with her hand.

"Certainly. That is my intention, if you tell me I may do so. Do you think I may?"

Miss Sims looked at me between the fingers of the hand and covered her face.

"Yes," she said, "I *think* you may."

I deliberated.

"My dear Miss Sims," I said, "I can never sufficiently repay the kindness—the sympathy, the great sympathy—you have shown to me to-day. I am going to take advantage of this sympathy."

"Sir!" cried Miss Sims.

"Yes; gratitude consists mostly in taking advantage of the people who are kind to you. I am going to ask still greater favour of you. Will you break this matter to your brother? Will you hint my feelings to Lotty?"

"I see no occasion for that! Why to Lotty?"

"Well; I respect your prudence. No doubt you are right. To your brother, then?"

"Had not *you* better do that? It is so very awkward."

"My dear Miss Sims, oblige me in this. I shall be eternally indebted to you."

Miss Sims gave me her angular white hand. She looked up into my face with an expression of most intense sympathy. "I will do anything you tell me, *Henry*," she said—"May I call you Henry?"

"I consider it a most tender mark of your sympathy," I replied. I really thought her calling me by my Christian name, which she had never done before, a touching proof of her kind friendship.

"And now," I said, "I had better go. I am not inclined to see anyone in the present state of my feelings. When I next see you, Miss Sims, I hope to be received in this house on another—a closer and more intimate footing. I think we fully understand each other?"

"Adieu! God bless you!"

* * * * *

My readers, I have no doubt, see clearly the fix I had got myself into. Will they believe me when I say that I had no notion of it myself! A preoccupied man assimilates every word that is spoken to the subject of

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his own pre-occupation. When he enters into tender confidences, he speaks in ambiguously bashful hints, not in the precise language wherewith he would draw up his will.

I left the house with a feeling of the greatest satisfaction. The first move had been made, and made, I could not but flatter myself, with consummate address, and with a success equal to my highest hopes. This good, kind aunt of Lotty, I was deeply grateful to her, and determined that I would make her a handsome present on my wedding.

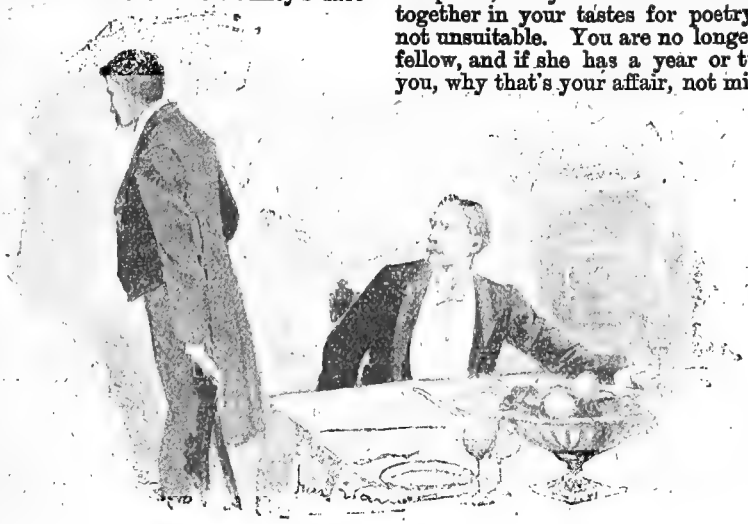
Everything went well.

The next morning I received a letter from Lotty's papa.

"I can have no objection, if you have none," he wrote. "I consent gladly to receive your visits at my house on the footing you desire. Come and dine with us at six, and we will talk it over."

* * * * *

I confess I was slightly nervous as I knocked at the Sims' door. There was a smile on the flunkey's face and an alacrity in his manner as he let me in. I saw that he knew all about it. What can we hide from these omniscient flunkeys?



I rushed from the room.

Miss Sims happened to be upon the stairs.

"How can I thank you?" I said, grasping her hand with a warmth of friendship. The flunkey had disappeared.

"Oh, Henry!" Miss Sims gasped.

Her feelings were too much for her. What a good heart this woman had to be so moved by the happiness of others. She clung to my hand, to my arm, to my shoulder, for support. She raised her eyes to mine, her face to mine—her lips; by Jove, I thought for a moment the good creature was going to kiss me.

"And how is—is—is she?" I said. "She is not unfavourable, I hope, towards my suit?"

"She is only too much blessed!" Miss Sims replied, with a smile, in which archness blended with sympathy. "Can you doubt it for a moment?"

At last I managed to reach the drawing-room door. Miss Sims would have me enter without her, for what reason I could not understand, but she professed to be too bashful and said:

"It would look so odd for us to enter together."

I was certainly very nervous. It cannot be expected that I should now relate accurately all that was said to me, and all that I said in return, when at the time itself I had no very clear notion of that same.

I stammered some sort of vague thanks and gratitude to Lotty's papa; and he said something about congratulating me in return, and then by mutual consent we suffered the conversation to turn on different subjects. Lotty's mamma helped me out of the difficulties of conversation as only a woman's fluent tongue can.

How I got through that dinner I cannot tell. The chief remembrance I have of it, is of the expression of Lotty's face.

I remember that we had champagne as upon some gala occasion. Lotty's papa drank Miss Sims' health and my health together in a humourous manner.

I was in a ghastly dream. Whether I knew the truth or did not know it I cannot tell. The dinner was over at length—the wine was put on. The ladies drank their one glass and left us.

As I opened the door for them Miss Sims whispered: "Do not be long."

We filled our glasses with claret.

"My dear fellow," said my host. "This little affair has given me the most entire satisfaction. I had not a suspicion of it.

"My sister Sarah, though I say it who shouldn't, is a most estimable person, a capital housewife, good-tempered, and you and she have always got on very well together in your tastes for poetry and so forth. Ages not unsuitable. You are no longer a chicken, my dear fellow, and if she has a year or two the advantage of you, why that's your affair, not mine. That is a matter of taste. Of course, you know that her little property amounts to a mere nothing. She has lived with us now for a number of years, and, upon my soul, I shall be sorry to lose her. But we must not be selfish in this world. Yes, I am convinced that Sarah will make you an excellent wife."

"Sir," I gasped, "there is some terrible and fatal mistake!"

"Mistake, sir?" cried my host fiercely; "what do you mean?"

"Your sister is a very respectable person," I stammered, "but I never had the remotest idea of—of——"

"Of what, sir?"

"The remotest idea of asking her to be my wife."

"Jones!" he said solemnly, "I always took you to be a man of honour. The feelings and affections of a woman are not to be played with in this atrocious manner——"

Everything swam before my eyes, the world was resolving itself again into chaos, the final collapse of all things was at hand.

Like Shylock, flung from the height of my certain hopes to ruin irretrievable and blank despair, I turned sick and faint.

"I pray you give me leave to go from hence. I am not well."

I rushed from the room—from the house.

The same night I took my passage on board an Ostend steamboat and floated in the darkness down the Thames, an exile from my native land.

W. Holcomb.

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That Hospitable House.

I opened my eyes and looked around me. A man was leaning over my bed; near the man stood a woman with a bonnet with great white wings on the sides, holding in her hand a moist compress. The room was plain and neat, with clean, white walls. On a table, covered with a great napkin of yellow linen, I noted a number of strange objects—rows of little phials, and a brown earthern jar filled with bits of ice. Through the muslin curtains, which flapped out from the window in the balmy air, I could see a patch of blue sky and the tops of green trees bending lightly in the breeze. Where was I? It seemed like a long dream that I had had; my head felt empty, my limbs ached, and I could not think.

The man gently lifted my head, and gave me a few drops of some liquid, which I swallowed with avidity.

"Well, Mr. Furniss," he said, "how do you feel?"

"Eh, what?" I muttered. "Where am I?"

"You are in my house, my dear sir, and we shall take good care of you. Now," he added, replacing my head on the pillow, "be quiet, and go to sleep."

I gazed at him for a long time, and all at once I recognised Doctor Bertram, the celebrated specialist in insanity. A shudder passed through my frame. Why was I in Doctor Bertram's hospital, instead of my own home in Phœnix Park, with my book, my herbs, and my microscopes around me? His hospital was for mad people!—and that Sister of Charity, those phials, that bowl of ice—Oh, heavens! I must be mad! But why—how?

"How long have I been here?" I asked, after a time.

"For four weeks, Mr. Furniss. But you must be quiet and sleep. Now do not talk."

For a month! Was it possible? What had happened. But even as I asked myself these questions, little by little I went off to sleep, and I saw in a billowy meadow, a road covered with blood and bordered on either side with monstrous microscopes shaped like trees—a road on which two little girls played at pitch and toss with a severed head, while Doctor Bertram, comically bonneted with a religious cap, rode astride a dead body, which reared and pranced and kicked till he could scarcely keep his seat.

The next morning I was better; and day by day I improved, though that horrible nightmare came to me each night. But it grew less and less distinct, and in a few weeks it almost ceased to trouble me.

One evening the doctor, whom I had not seen during the day, seated himself near my bed.

"Well," said he, feeling my pulse, "you are doing famously. I'll have you out, as good as new, in a few days. But you've had a close shave. It has been one of the prettiest cases of cerebral congestion I have ever handled—a beautiful case.

"Why, it's a wonder you are alive now. Tell me, how is your memory; can you remember what happened before you were brought here?"

"I—I don't know, I cannot think. I have passed through something fearful. What it is I cannot say. From the faint glimmer of recollection that comes to me, I have the sensation of having been dead—murdered! Oh, it is frightful. My brain is weak yet. Then, the child, a pretty golden-haired child—rolling on the floor!"

"Come, come, this will never do," said the Doctor. "You can tell me all about it in the morn——"

"No, now, Doctor," I cried. "It is coming back to me. Yes, I have it now."

Here is an exact transcript of my recital as I told it to Doctor Bertram, and, later, to the magistrate.

You know my passion for natural history. Well, scarcely a week passes that I do not go into the country botanising. That day I went to Glasnevin, where, as you know, the marshy meadows are rich in curious plants, infusoria, and diatoms. I was returning, and was almost in Dublin with my box full of rare specimens, on which I expected to make a report that would astonish the Botanical Society, when I saw a little girl, certainly not more than five or six years old, who was all alone, crying as if her little heart would break.

I approached her, but at sight of me she redoubled her cries. I could see that the little one was lost, and that she did not know where to go, so I spoke to her kindly, and, by dint of promising her unlimited sweetmeats got her to tell me that her name was Lizzie, and that she lived near Beresford Place in Lower Abbey Street. I took her hand, and we soon started off, talking like old friends.

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She was a beautiful child, fresh and rosy, with great, candid eyes and fair hair, which was cut short over her eyes and fell in ringlets about her shoulders. She trotted bravely along, her soft little hand holding my great, ruddy paw confidingly. As we walked she told me remarkable tales, in which figured a big, black horse, a little knife, a doll, and a number of people I did not know.

Lizzie was afraid she would be scolded when she arrived home, but she was not, and I—I was received with transports by her mother, who was half distracted. Never was gratitude expressed so heartily and pleasantly. Who was I? Where did I live? How did I happen to find her? and a thousand like questions were showered upon me.

"Oh, Mr. Furniss," said the mother, "you are the saviour of my child! How can we express our gratitude? We are not rich, but such a debt cannot be paid in gold. How happy my husband will be to repeat my thanks to you! He is still at his office; but—will you do us a great kindness, will you honour our humble board to-morrow? I shall have a *savant* here like yourself, and you two will enjoy each other's company, I am sure. And my husband will be so happy to have you."

I thanked her for the invitation, and promised to be present.

At the appointed hour I was shown into their modest drawing-room, and you may be sure the husband's gratitude was no less warmly expressed than the wife's. And little Lizzie threw her arms around my neck, and showered on me the innocent caresses of a happy child. I seemed, indeed, to be one of the family.

The dinner was a merry one, the *savant* seemed to be an interesting man—in brief, I passed an excellent evening.

The air had been heavy the whole day, and in the evening a storm came. Thunderclaps succeeded one another without interruption, the rain fell in torrents. Whether it was the effect of the storm, of the suffocating heat, or of the wine which I had drunk, I felt a strange melancholy, I could not breathe comfortably. I was about to set out for home, however, for it was late and my house was at some distance; but they insisted that I should stay. It would be foolish to expose myself to such a tempest when I was not feeling well; the mother begged me with such good grace that I was forced to remain and pass the night in that hospitable house. They ceremoniously conducted me to my room, and there wished me good night. I remember even that Lizzie, having fallen asleep in her father's arms, I kissed her little cheek, paled by sleep, and her dimpled little arms.

Left alone, I began to undress slowly, and wandering about the room, as one always does when one sleeps in a strange place. I felt as if I should be smothered in the close atmosphere of the room. Before getting into bed, I wanted to inhale a little of the outside air, and in spite of the roaring storm, I tried to open the window. It was a false window.

"Well, well!" I exclaimed, a little surprised.

I thought I would remove the chimney screen; it was a false chimney. I rushed to the door—it was locked! Fear seized me, and, holding my breath, I listened. The house was quiet, all seemed to be asleep. Then I inspected the room carefully, straining my ears for the least sound. On the floor, near the bed, I noticed spots; it was blood—dried and blackened blood! I shuddered, and a cold sweat stood out on my forehead. Blood! Why should there be blood there? And I saw that a whole sea of blood must have been spilt there—for a great space around the hard wooden floor had been freshly scrubbed and scraped. I tried to call out.

Under the bed I had seen a man, stretched out motionless as an overturned statue. I could not cry or call out. With trembling hands I touched the man. He did not move. With trembling hands I pushed the man; he did not move. With trembling hands I seized the man by the feet and drew him forth—he was dead! His neck had been cleanly cut, as with one stroke of a razor, and the head held to the trunk only by a slender ligament.

I thought I should go mad. But something must be done—the assassin might come at any moment. I raised the body, placed it on the bed, and, having blown out the candle, I slipped under the bed. I did all this mechanically, without thought of defence or safety; it was instinct that prompted me, not intelligence or reflection.

My teeth chattered. My hands were wet with a thick moisture. I felt as if I had gone to bed in a charnel-house.

I remained there, in that awful fear, minutes, hours, months, years, centuries—I do not know how long. I lost all idea of time and place. All was silent. From without, the noise of the storm and the whistling of the wind came to me softened and sad, like moans. I could not picture to myself the assassin who was coming—who was there perhaps. In that state of horror, I could see only little Lizzie, fair, rosy, and frank, with her doll and her great hat; I could see her sleeping in her father's arms; and then she lightly raised her eyelids and disclosed her eyes, which seemed to me to be bold, inplacable, cruel, murderous.

The door opened, but as softly as the scratching of a mouse. I bit my lip till the blood came, to keep from crying out. Now a man stepped in with gliding tread, with infinite precautions to avoid touching the furniture. It seemed to me as if I could see the cruel, clutching fingers gliding over my clothes, searching my pockets. Then the steps came nearer—seemed to graze me. I felt that the man was bending over the bed; that he struck one fierce blow. Then I knew nothing more.

When I recovered consciousness, the room had become silent again. But fright held me nailed to the spot. At length I decided to escape, with what caution you may imagine. On tiptoe I gained the door, which had not been closed. Not a sound, not a breath. Feeling my way, I passed into the hall. I waited to see a head thrust suddenly from out of the shadows, a knife gleam in the dark. But no—the brute, glutted with crime, slept without remorse. I descended the stairs, drew the bolt of the door, and, half fainting, with the blood frozen in my veins, I fell into the gutter of the deserted street.

Doctor Bertram had listened to my recital with the deepest interest.

"And there I found you, Mr. Furniss, and in what a state! Could you recognise the house?"

"Yes," I replied; "but to what end?"

"Well, let me cure you, and then we shall go together to the house of these assassins."

Eight days later, the doctor and I stood in lower Abbey Street. I recognised the terrible house. All the blinds were drawn; in front of the door a placard was placed, bearing the legend: "To Let."

I inquired of the former residents from a neighbour.

"They have been gone a month and more," she replied. "It's a great pity, for they were very nice people."

Reginald Baird.

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THE DESERTER.

In 1864 the horrors of war spread over the South of America like a pall of death. Not only did they stalk among the soldiers to strip the rags from their backs; to starve them or to feed them on rotten meat; to place them in the deadly path of the Minie or the murderous grape; to mow them down with foul disease and loathsome suffering; but they sent conscription to feed mothers on despair and children on stones, and hunger to take up its abode at the fireside of the poor.

The facilities of the transitory and feeble government for supplying means of sustenance to poor families were inadeqate in remote and sparsely settled communities; and now that the husband, on whom had depended the livelihood of his family, had been armed with a musket and ordered to the front, there was no lack of anguish and the distressing cry of children for bread. The despairing mother wrote to her husband on paper that was blotted with tears, and from every word there stared at him the suffering faces of his children, and the imploring look that no parent can withstand.

So the staunch soldier, who could unflinchingly storm a rampart or face a cannon, and who looked upon death as his companion and honour as his future shroud, employed his affections as his gravedigger, and sneaked away in the darkness like a thief. Desertion and death were synonymous terms, and the man sacrificed his life to feed his children. Depletion of the ranks by desertion assumed such alarming proportions that the War Department stretched forth its relentless arm and stained its sword with the blood of its own men. It was not a question of bread for children, but of men for the vanguard.

Desertion was, in point of number, equivalent to death on the battlefield, so far as it affected the strength of the line; in point of discipline it was a thousand times worse. A man's life was worth nothing unless it served to check the career of a rifle-ball directed at the vitals of the government. To such a desperate strait had the war policy of the Confederate Government been reduced, that in order to discourage a defection that was becoming epidemic, a patrol was employed, which, with the assistance of hounds in rare instances, hunted the deserters down and hanged them in chains, or shot them, blindfolded, with their faces to the wall.

One day a deserter named Martin was at work in a cornfield attached to his humble dwelling. Four or five pale, ragged, emaciated children were amusing themselves in the yard, and a homely careworn woman was bending over a wash-tub, while her infant, with hollowed eyes and wasted limbs, was playing in the dirt at her side. The man had been at home unmolested for two months, and had come to experience a faint sense of security.

When darkness came on he shouldered his hoe and trudged to the house, taking in his arm a few pine knots which were to furnish light for the evening. The family sat down to a supper of cornbread, which they washed down with a disgusting drink. It was made from corn, roasted until it was black; it was called "coffee," and was drunk with sugar.

"Well, Mary," said the husband, "the corn will be in rasting-ear in two weeks, and we shall have something fit to eat."

"Yes," said the woman.

"And then, you know, the birds will begin to flock in, and I can trap a few of them and get meat."

"Yes."

"I think we're going to get along first rate. I don't believe the war will last three months longer. You know one reason for so much desertion is that a great many soldiers have no idea now that we can ever whip the North, and they think that if they desert, the Confederate will go under before the patrol can catch them. I'm thinking that I'm almost out of danger."

"I hope so, William; but there's no telling."

"All right, Mary; but they can't take me alive."

This declaration was made with such a calm and quiet determination that the poor woman looked anxiously at the hard lines about his eyes and mouth. She knew that he meant it, and that the loaded revolver he always carried would never hesitate a moment.

In striking contrast to the woman, the man was of powerful build. His hardships in the army had toughened his muscles, and strengthened his large bones and supple joints. In a simple measure of strength he would have been a match for two ordinary men. His shoulders were broad and erect, and his arms and legs large and full of power.

They sat silently watching the blazing knots in the broad fireplace, the woman engaged with some coarse knitting, and the man smoking home-made tobacco in an old clay pipe. On a sudden, the man took the pipe from his mouth, straightened his shoulders, and listened attentively. His wife noticed the movement and hurriedly whispered:

"What is it, William?"

"Sh-h-h!"

They listened a moment longer, and the man stealthily rose to his feet and gazed steadily at the door, which was barred on the inside.

"What is it, William?" the woman again whispered; having strained her hearing in vain to catch any unusual sound.

"Horses."

"Where?"

He answered by pointing in the direction of the road. The truth flashed upon the woman's mind that, beyond a doubt, a hunting party was abroad, and that their game was a deserter. She rose to her feet, very pale, and regarded her husband with an anxious look. The man glanced at his children, lying asleep in their cots, cast a loving look at his wife, stepped softly to a shelf on which was a bucket of water, and dashed its contents upon the fire. The blaze was extinguished, and the room was in profound darkness.

"Run William!" whispered the woman, in a quavering voice.

He silently clasped her in his arms, and said:

"Keep a brave heart, Mary. They can't take me alive!"

He pushed her away, although she unconsciously clung to him, pulled out his revolver, cocked it, and let the hammer down softly. He then put on his hat, quietly unbarred the door, and slipped out in the dark.

The sound of the horses' hoofs had ceased. The woman staggered to the open door, and saw several dark forms hurrying round the cottage. They must have

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seen her husband, for a stern voice called "Halt!" and she heard the click of a carbine.

A shadowy figure stole crouching alongside a fence, and on hearing the command it suddenly straightened, and bounded forward like a frightened deer. There was a vivid flash and a report from the carbine, and the stealthy figure halted a moment, and returned the fire. The soldier fell as a pistol ball crashed through his shoulder; the fugitive ran with redoubled speed, and disappeared in the darkness. There was a rapid discharge of carbines, but Martin had gained the swamp, and further pursuit was out of the question.

The hunters returned and bore the wounded man into the woman's cottage. She rekindled the fire, and assisted, with trembling hands, in dressing the wound.

"How long has your husband been here?" asked the captain.

"Two months."

"Where will he go?"

"I don't know."

"You do know!"

The woman made no reply.

"Do you know you are guilty of harbouring a deserter?"

"Yes," she said, firmly and proudly, looking him full in the face.

"Do you know what can be done with you?"

She said nothing.

"You can be arrested, and punished for a crime."

She regarded him with intense scorn, and remained silent.

"I'm glad he got away," she said at length quietly.

"Did you assist him in escaping?"

"He needed no help."

"He surely told you where he was going?"

She shook her head.

"Did he say when he will come back?"

"No."

"Now, I see that you are a woman of sense and courage. If you will tell me where I can find him I will not arrest you. You would not like to be handcuffed, and carried to prison?"

"I wouldn't care."

"What would become of your children?"

The woman became pale, her eyes flashed, and she stammered:

"You would not leave them here to starve, would you?"

"Certainly," said the officer, as he laughed at her agony.

The mother was transformed into a tigress. She sprang across the room, seized a carbine that leant against the wall, and levelled it at his head.

"You would! You cowardly, inhuman brute!" She screamed as she pulled the trigger.

There was a deafening report, and she fell fainting to the floor.

"Simply sheared me a little," remarked the officer, as, with a certain degree of interest, he felt a narrow, white streak, that the ball had cut through his hair. "An inch lower, and—what was it old Man said at Austerlitz? She's game, though, and quick as lightning. No use trying to get anything out of her. I just wanted to scare her a little, and she took it in dead earnest."

"What are you going to do now, Captain?" asked one of the men.

"Oh, I'll put Walker's dogs after him. They'll fetch him."

"The bloodhounds?"

"Yes."

"Will you follow them up?"

"I don't know."

"They'll never leave him alive if you don't."

"I know it."

"That would be terrible."

"Why?"

"They got that fellow Rutherford down, and tore him to pieces."

"Well, what's the difference? Is that any worse than calling the dogs off, and bringing him back alive to be shot?"

"But he's armed and will kill the hounds."

"Twelve dogs? Don't be uneasy. He will finish two or three of the younger dogs, until his pistol is empty, and the rest will manage him.

"Old Tiger will be there at the finish and will make all the final arrangements for the funeral. He hangs on closer than death, and they've never got a square blow or a safe shot at him yet."

At daybreak, the next morning, an old man, smooth-shaved and stoop shouldered, was riding in the direction of the woman's cottage. The cavalry captain accompanied him, and eleven bloodhounds—magnificent dogs—trotted along, some ahead, and others on either side of the horsemen, while two hundred yards in the rear, a solitary dog jogged along, as if already weary of the enterprise, and disgusted with the life he was called upon to lead. This was none other than the famous Tiger, more generally called "Old Tige," the dog that never lost a trail, and never failed to run his game to earth.

"Walker," said the officer, "I think we had better skirt the woods, and not let the woman know that we've got the dogs out. She might give us trouble."

They entered the swamp in the direction the man had taken, and Walker called the dogs about him. Tiger walked leisurely up, and lay down near his master's horse.

"Heigho! get up, sir!"

The old dog slowly obeyed the command, and stood blinking and staring stupidly at his master. Walker descended from his horse, and, pointing to the ground, said:

"Hie on!"

The other dogs were already scouring the ground, in all directions. Old Tige put his nose to the grass and began to hunt the scent by systematically describing a circle, which he continually widened, his master watching him closely the meanwhile, and paying no attention to the other dogs. A young hound soon sent up the well-known howl, and the other dogs chased eagerly around him, Old Tige trotting to the scene behind all the others.

The dogs were greatly excited. The old dog unceremoniously pushed his way through the crowd, and sniffed the ground. The young hound, impatient that no command was given, and satisfied that he had found the trail, slowly advanced into the swamp, his nose all the time to the ground. Soon he set off on a full run, the other dogs following with yelps. Old Tige examined the spot indicated by the young hound, but was entirely unconcerned, and proceeded to smell the ground for a few yards around. Walker called the other dogs back, and old Tige sullenly shook his head until his ragged ears flapped against his jowls, and lay down again.

"He's not satisfied," said Walker. "I will have to show him the track. He's in doubt."

Walker crept away along the fence, followed by the old dog, and when he had reached the spot opposite where the man was last seen, he saw through the fence

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a track indented in the soft earth, and ordered the dog to climb over. Old Tige clambered laboriously over the rails, and scented the track. He regained his master's side, and trudged with him back to the swamp.

"I think the woman heard the dogs," said Walker. "I saw her looking through the door and listening. Tiger's got the scent. Hie away, sir!"

The dog hunted for a few minutes, and found the trail.

With a single yelp he disappeared in the thicker part of the underbrush, and the whole pack bounded yelping after him. They pursued the trail for a mile through the swamp, and mounted a hill on the opposite side. They disappeared over the summit, and Old Tige, already far behind, reached the highest point, and came to a standstill. He remained for one or two minutes surveying the surrounding country, and then struck off at right angle from the trail, with his nose high in the air and his tail straight with his back. He went in the direction of a large plateau covered with tall pines and salamander hills.

Occasionally he would stop, as if listening to the yelping of the hounds as it rapidly grew fainter in the distance. Having traversed the plateau, which was five miles in width, he came to the outskirts of a canebrake, and bent his nose to the ground. He proceeded two miles along the edge of the dense growth of cane until he found a path which led through.

The traveller would be compelled to pick his way through the mud and water by stepping carefully upon poles and cyprus roots.

The dog sniffed the ground attentively at the entrance to the swamp, and a sudden swishing of the tail and a loud snorting showed that he had found the trail. Before entering, he looked behind him and listened for the dogs, standing the meanwhile on three legs, and as still as a statue. No sound could be heard. They had followed the trail and had gone fifteen miles, while the old dog had cut across the country and headed them off.

He pulled through the mire, clambered over the slippery poles, jumped from root to root, and from tuft to tuft, until he gained the opposite side. Here he found a fence that was decayed and broken down. It inclosed a field that had been in disuse for several years, and that was overgrown with young pines and dewberry vines. Near the opposite side of the field was an abandoned log cabin. The mud had long ago dropped from the cracks between the logs; the roof was partly gone; the chimney had fallen, and was a pile of mud and sticks; the windows had lost their shutters years ago, and the hewn slabs, with which the floor was laid, were disarranged and decayed.

The berries in the field were ripe, and the dog consumed considerable time in wandering around the pines, his nose all the while close to the ground and his tail whisking fiercely. The cause is easily explained; the man had picked the berries and breakfasted in the field. The trail was hot, but the dog remaining silent, every now and then raising his head and peering about him. The old cabin was almost hidden by young mulberries and China trees.

The dog left the trail finally and trotted to the door of the cabin. He place his fore-feet upon the block that served as a step, and looked cautiously around the interior. His victim lay upon his face in a corner, sound asleep, his forehead resting upon his right arm, and the pistol clasped in his right hand. The dog pricked up his drooping ears and eyed him curiously. He noiselessly gained the door-sill, still keeping his eyes cautiously on the sleeping man. He advanced one foot upon a slab to the right, but it rocked and made a slight noise.

Another method of approach was left. The wily old dog crept under the sill and proceeded under the house towards the corner in which the deserter slumbered. About three feet from where he lay a slab had been displaced, leaving an opening of six feet long and twelve inches wide. The dog cautiously poked his head through the hole, planted his fore-paw upon a beam, and gradually brought his shoulders upward until he stood almost erect upon his hind legs. With a dexterous, noiseless spring, he brought his hind feet upon the beam, and stood a moment in this cramped position.

Finding the sleeping man still undisturbed, he approached him carefully, taking steps slowly. He smelt the man's muddy boots, drawing deep and silent inspirations, and sniffed along his entire person until he reached his head, and here he breathed with much greater caution. The man was in his shirt sleeves, and his large, strong neck presented a tempting field for attack. But the dog was old and his fangs were worn with age. He regarded the exposed neck so eagerly, and his whole frame was so rigid, that it seemed he was on the point of taking a desperate step.

Had the man lain with his throat uppermost, perhaps the dog would not have hesitated. As it was, while he was regarding the bait that tempted him he suddenly pricked up his ears and listened attentively. He heard the yelping of the hounds as they emerged from the canebrake. Stepping cautiously backward he disappeared through the hole, slunk into a dark corner under the cabin, and lay down.

The hounds crossed the fence, noisy, furious, and bloodthirsty. They tore through the patch of berries, and their noise awakened the man. He listened, and then sprang to his feet. He trembled in every joint, and his teeth chattered with fear. He looked round wildly and despairingly, and discovered a joist above his head. Securing the pistol in his belt, he sprang upward and caught the joist with his hands. It was old and rotten and swayed under his weight, but he pulled himself upon it and awaited the dogs.

They rushed blindly into the cabin, foaming and yelping, eagerly smelled the slabs on which the man had slept, ran around the cabin barking and hungry for blood, crawled under the cabin, scoured the shrubbery, went over the field again, and rushed madly back into the cabin. Knowing that they would find him sooner or later, and that every moment he lost lessened the distance between himself and the human bloodhounds, the man selected the largest and finest-looking dog, and sent a bullet between his eyes.

The hound rolled over with quivering limbs and stiffening muscles. The dogs were thunderstruck, but not dismayed. One strong young hound made a desperate spring, and fastened his fangs in the man's heel. He fell with a shot through the brain. The man had three shots left, and he must reserve at least one for a last extremity. He had killed two dogs and counted nine remaining. With two more well directed shots he reduced the number to seven.

By this time the fugitive had warmed to his work. The blood tingled in his hands and arms, and he felt his great strength bulging and swelling his muscles. No time was to be lost. He replaced the pistol, stood upon the joist, and pushed a few boards from the roof. Grasping the rotten rafters, he pul'ed himself

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upon the roof, and sought a bludgeon. The boards were of oak, and were weighed down with logs, which ran traversely, and which he easily pushed off with his feet. With little difficulty he secured a worm-eaten partially-decayed board, four feet long, and an inch thick. By striking it over the end of a log, he split it, and was thus armed with a powerful weapon.

Martin crawled carefully to the eaves, and prepared to give battle to the deadly enemy. He looked upon the ground, but the dogs were not visible; and, steadying himself, he dropped heavily and caught nimbly on his feet. He felt that he must finish the fight within half-an-hour, or he would be confronted with carbines and pistols. The dogs heard him drop, and sprang through the door. The man turned quickly and raised his weapon; the seven dogs made a furious onslaught, but a powerful blow upon the head sent the leader rolling dead upon the ground. The rotten board was strained by the blow, and he must use it more carefully. Six ferocious dogs still confronted him, and two eyes that he did not see blinked at him from under the cabin. The vigour with which the deserter met the attacks, and the threatening attitude that he maintained, disconcerted the dogs, and they ran around him at a safe distance, their teeth glistening, their tails whisking, their heads bent to the ground, the froth dripping from their protruding tongues.

The man suddenly dashed at a dog, and mortally wounded him with a heavy blow on the back of the neck. While he was in the act of striking, and before he could regain his defensive attitude, an active young dog, with fangs as sharp as knives, sprang upon his shoulders, and fastened his teeth in the back of the man's neck. The other dogs, emboldened by the success of their companion made a furious attack from behind. The man faced about, with the fangs of the hound still imbedded in his neck, and his back ripped and lacerated with the sharp claws of the suspended dog, and struck about wildly and desperately, breaking the jaw of one and the leg of another. He made one terrible blow that, in his agony, missed the mark, and his noble bludgeon was shattered against the ground.

The dog gnawed at his neck, and imbedded his fangs still deeper in the flesh, causing the blood to pour down the man's back and breast. At this moment, when the man was paralyzed with pain, and frantic at the loss of his weapon, the two dogs still unhurt that confronted him, sprang upon him, buried their teeth in his flesh, and bore him to the ground.

He sank upon his knees, threw off the two dogs with a mighty effort, and defended his throat with all the desperation and strength that aroused his every energy, and sustained his failing hopes.

They snapped at his hands, and tore them; and completely stripped the shirt from his body. They ploughed his skin with their claws, and the blood gushed from a hundred wounds. One of the dogs allowed the strong hand of the man to close upon his throat, and then he was flung stunned to the ground. Catching an idea from this manœuvre, the man allowed the other hound to seize his arm, then took him by the leg and dashed him against the house.

The deserter was growing faint; but he staggered to his feet, grasped the hind legs of the dog that clung so tenaciously to his neck, snapped the bones as though they were reeds, and jerked him from his hold, tearing the flesh horribly.

By one of those curious eccentricities of fortuitous chance, the man found a weapon in his hands in the dog that he held by the legs, and that snapped at his legs, and writhed, and squirmed, and howled.

The two hounds that he had succeeded in throwing off rallied their strength and returned to the attack cooler and wiser, but none the less terrible. The man backed against the wall, and met the charge by knocking down a dog with the one he held in his hands.

Finding that he could not advantageously wield his heavy weapon in such close proximity to the wall, he suddenly advanced, and knocked over the other dog in the act. The blows, heavy as they were, did not disable his two antagonists. Every time that he swung down his living bludgeon it became weaker and its struggles more faint. He struck rapidly and carefully, husbanding his strength, yet every now and then missing his object, as it would adroitly evade the blow, and bringing down his heavy club against the ground with a dull thud, crushing its bones, and dislocating its vertebra.

The wounded hounds had hidden in the thicket, and the two that remained had become bruised and crippled, and had changed their tactics into harassing their enemy until he had expended all his strength.

He felt himself growing sick and faint, and he recognised the necessity of immediately bringing the fight to a close by capturing his enemies with strategy. He threw aside his weapon, but the dogs simply glared at him. If he could only get them in his clutches again he would be saved, but experience had made them cunning. So he suddenly threw up his hands and fell, and they sprang to his throat. Quick as a cat he seized a throat in each hand, turned them over upon the ground with great difficulty, planted his great knees upon their breasts, and crushing their ribs with his remaining strength, choked them until life was extinct.

The terrible fight had lasted two hours. The man staggered to his feet, and looked around. Not a soul was in sight. He drew a deep breath, and his naked, bloody chest swelled with triumph. But the loss of blood, and the extreme pain of his wounds, had so exhausted him, that he felt the ground rising to strike him in the face, and with a heavy lunge, he lay extended upon the ground.

Two glittering eyes, followed by the neck and shoulders of a hound, emerged from under the cabin. Old Tige crept forward softly, but darted back, as the man, with a desperate effort, rose to his hands and knees. The deserter battled bravely with unconsciousness, but was dying of thirst. He crawled painfully along a disused path leading to a spring, while the blood streamed upon the ground.

On reaching the spring, he drank freely, and bathed his face and head. The blood poured from his wounds and changed to the colour of wine the little stream that flowed from the spring. The dog had followed him unseen, and was crouching behind a thick clump of shrubbery. The man, refreshed by the water, again staggered to his feet, but the pines swam before his eyes, and he fell unconscious to the ground. The old dog approached cautiously, and closed his powerful jaws upon the throat of the fainting man.

* * * * *

A woman, pale and haggard, and with the wild light of insanity in her eyes, sat on the ground, and held the head of her husband in her lap, and rocked, and moaned, and sang, and cried, and called him vainly. The eyes that stared at the sky were so terribly bloodshot, and the face was so black, and the features so distorted, that it is strange she recognised as her husband the disfigured, lifeless body of Martin, the deserter.

Richard Sibert.

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THE KNIGHT OF THE BLUE ARMOUR

MANY hundred years ago a grim castle frowned with surly aspect from a pile of rocks upon a lonely island.

Rumour said an ogre dwelt there; but really it was Gaston de Mesquin (which translated means sordid and stingy), better known as the Knight of the Blue Armour, who had disappeared from his home in France to guard his treasures in this remote place.

This baron had robbed and plundered his own and foreign countries to so great an extent that his life was not safe. To protect himself, he had ordered a suit of armour to be made in Toledo.

He surveyed himself with pride, for so strangely was the steel burnished that sometimes it appeared bronze, sometimes blue, and sometimes green, and as its owner went clanking about the chamber, he resolved to call himself the Knight of the Blue Armour, and to start a report that he was enchanted.

Rumour wears myriad wings, and, as her lips magnify every tale her ears hear, she spreads this report throughout the country. The frightened servants fled, and alone and mysteriously did the knight convey his hoard of treasures to the rocky island.

The king, who lost his tribute by its master's flight, seized the castle; and nobody mourned the loss of the avaricious nobleman who had sacrificed so many lives for his selfish gain, and nobody tried to discover his fate.

When ten years had dropped their petals in the garden of time, a pestilence swept over the country, leaving famine in its wake; and, although the grief-stricken remnant of humanity murmured prayers for deliverance, no help came.

In their distress they turned to Father Francis, the benevolent, learned, sympathetic monk, whose little church stood not far from the deserted castle.

Father Francis could sit in his little garden in the shade of its high wall all day among the spicy gilli-flowers, the fluffy red peonies and the cloth-of-gold roses, watching the green dragon-flies and brown, speckled butterflies at play among the velvet petals, hearing the birds sing their songs in the swaying trees, and taking pleasure in the bounce and buzz of the industrious bees filling their honey-bags; or he could close his eyes to these delights and study here, as well as in his bare room, odd volumes held together by heavy silver clasps and filled with quaint lettering of ancient scribes.

But even when at his orisons in the chapel, he was always ready to listen to the woes of his people, and to help them by word or deed; for Father Francis believed himself nearer Heaven's blessings when helping mankind than at any other time.

He still believed the Knight of the Blue Armour to be alive, and connected him with the legend of the island, that could be seen on a clear day like a golden dot on the sky line across the sparkling sea.

If he could approach the tyrant, perhaps he might soften his heart. Father Francis called his people together in a little ivy-wreathed chapel.

"I go," he said, "to procure help to that island which legend calls enchanted. Be its owner monster, dragon, wizard or cruel man, I will bid him aid you, my dear children. Who will sail thither with me?"

The faces grew pale.

"Do not leave us, Father Francis, do not leave us," was the cry.

"Who will go with me?" he repeated.

Then in the silence out spoke the bold voice of Jean le Hardi: "I am your unworthy companion, Father Francis, if you will have me."

"One is all I need," answered the monk, "and now farewell, my children; we go to-day. I give you my blessing!"

The people bowed their heads and sobbed. The old ones grieved to lose their priest, but the young maidens sorrowed for the handsome, dauntless Jean, who had captured their tender hearts.

As Adele du Bois walked out under the arched stone door, she found Jean waiting. He clasped her hand and told her in his ardent gaze the secret she had craved so long.

She slipped her scented rosary on his wrist for a talisman, and to thank her he bent his tall head and kissed her before the astonished and jealous girls, at whose gaze deep poppies rose in her cheeks under the shadow of her crimpled linen wimple.

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One bright morning the Knight of the Blue Armour had left his stronghold and lay basking on the rocks. He enjoyed the fresh breeze that blew away the curling heads of the roaring waves as he had blown away human sympathy.

Like himself, the day was cold and brilliant in appearance, and the sun seemed to delight in striking upon the figure that lay a shapeless mass of glittering steel upon the huge brown boulders.

Insensible to the loneliness of the place, he was rejoicing in his good luck to have been so long unmolested, when his quick eye detected a tiny black speck drifting from wave to wave, midway between the island and the ship, many leagues away.

In it were two men, an elderly priest and a strong, handsome youth, who pulled the oars with a hearty stroke.

"It is he," said Father Francis to Jean, as a gigantic billow dropped them down its slippery side in full view of the rock, on which the knight rested. "I thought the Blue Knight and the ogre were identical. Pull steady, Jean, and keep a stout heart."

The knight, meanwhile, with a very angry expression, rose to his feet.

"Who lands?" he cried to the intruders. "Who lands? Is it peace? Is it menace? This island is mine; neither friend nor foe is welcome. Ye land on peril of your lives."

"We are messengers of peace," said Father Francis, as he stepped from the boat, followed by Jean, "and, after craving your pardon and begging for your grace, we sue for favour."

"Beg and sue as you please," was the reply; "your blood will answer for your crime of entering my rocky gates. Begone."

Adele du Bois walked out.

"I know you, Gaston de Mesquin," said the priest, undisturbed by threat and scowl and furious gestures, "I know you. Have I believed the tales of your disappearance? Do I not know that yonder castle contains the treasures won by your greed of will and strength of arm?

"Listen; your people, who are my people, starve. Atone for your evil deeds by giving your bounty to succour the suffering ones. Help them, help; help for their sakes, for your present peace, for your future reward, and for my sake—who will call heaven's gifts of mercy upon your path. Help them!"

"I would the plague had carried you off, too; mayhap famine will, if he bide long enough.

"Were my prayers useful, I would piece head of nation on to tail of vesper and beg him starve thy stomach into dust. Begone, I say, both of you; begone!"

Turning, he started up the beach with haughty, swinging strides.

"Halt, sir knight," called Father Francis, "halt! Once more I give you a chance to atone for your past misdeeds of rapacity. Will you aid your people, or will you continue to selfishly guard what you have gained?

"Choose, for I am empowered to bring you to punishment. Choose, for in this hour your doom is set. Whether you wish it or not, your property is mine—mine to divide among your people, who are my people."

The strong breeze played with the white curls on the troubled brow of Father Francis, for he hoped the knight would relent and escape his doom. But these could not pierce his heart any more effectually than the sun could dart its rays through the glittering armour.

"How blue the sea, how blue the sky, how hard the knight's face, how grieved the monk!" Such were the thoughts of Jean, who gazed wonderingly at the scene.

A strange thing happened.

"It is sad, Jean, but I must punish this man," said Father Francis, as the knight walked away. "We cannot spill his blood, yet we must seize his possessions for the hungry ones at home. Watch!"

As they overtook him again the Knight of the Blue Armour turned with a menacing glance, but was arrested by the monk, who said slowly:

"Knight of the Blue Armour, there are treasures in the sea—guard them; there are monsters in the sea—go live with them. You wear armour—it shall cling to you; the sign and seal of your greedy nature shall be a cumbersome claw; your eye shall shrivel in its socket; and your heart, men shall look for in vain. Begone!"

This was hardly spoken when the knight vanished, and a huge lobster fell from the rocks into the ocean with a great splash.

Father Francis and Jean signalled their ship to land. They loaded it with the spoils of the castle and sailed home; one to the charge of his people, the other to the gentle Adele.

So well does the lobster fulfil the charm that, clad in his helmet and cuirass of mail—a marvel of flexibility—he guards for ever the secret caverns of the ocean.

One thing reminds the Knight of the Blue Armour of his greed—the awkward grasping claw which so often brings him into trouble. ESTHER SINGLETON.

The next number of SHORT STORIES will contain the opening chapters of "Pauper Blue-Blood," a new serial romance by Miss Winifred Graham, whose writings are already known to readers of this paper.

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THE EYES OF LUCILE.

For five years there had been clouds of smoke circling in Valentine's eyes, the roar of surf was in his ears, and sullen apathy in his breast. The world passed before him in a dull grey dream of uninteresting figures, and he seldom knew if it were morning or night.

"How sad—how very sad," he sometimes heard a voice saying; "Val was such a promising boy. But the craze for drink—well, he got it from his father."

He would slowly sweep his leaden eyes upward to see who had criticised him thus, but if he discovered anyone, he could not determine who it was, and the words he would have said in response, stuck in his throat and would not leave his tongue. His servant, the white, bent old man that had cared for his father during twenty years of his lurid life, wept over Valentine as the boy lay at night in the heavy sleep that succeeded his days of drunkenness.

"He'll be dead soon—he'll be dead within a year—the beautiful boy," would mutter the old man, as he bent over the bed and smoothed back the matted hair from Valentine's brow. And then the poor old fellow would kneel and pray for the "dear child," whom he had seen at the hour of his birth and loved as his own ever since. And, praying, he would sink away to troubled sleep, holding Val's hand until he was aroused by the hoarse whisper:

"Morton! Morton! The brandy."

Of late Morton's granddaughter had been coming in the evenings to Valentine's apartments while Val was away, to sit with her grandfather and tell him the news of the outer world, of which he saw nothing. They hung over the table in the soft glow of a lamp, and with clasped hands talked gently together.

"They have asked me to be the fairy queen in the tableaux at the Church, grandpa," said the girl one evening.

"That is because you are so pretty, Lucile," replied old Morton, stroking the slender white hand that lay in his.

The girl blushed and turned her eyes away. They looked into a mirror, and the lashes drooped.

"Alice takes good care of you, I know," muttered Morton, half to himself, as his gaze roamed over the fair head and graceful form of his granddaughter. "She guards you well, eh?"

"Mamma says I cannot be the fairy queen," replied the girl, looking up again regretfully.

"Good," he exclaimed. "Alice is a thoughtful mother. She does not want you exhibited, Lucile. That is right."

There was a knock at the outer door. Morton sprang to his feet.

"It's Val," he exclaimed. "I did not expect him for hours. Lucile—you must not see him. But there is only one way out. Wait! when I let him in you pass quickly by him. Do not hesitate. He will not notice you! but hurry!"

As he spoke, he went into the narrow hallway, and opened the door. The girl rose, and poised herself like a bird for flight. By some chance Valentine, his handsome face as white as marble, his lustrous eyes glittering with the fever of drink, paused exactly on the threshold when he reached the room and braced himself by extending his arms on each side of the doorway, thus completely barring the entrance. His gaze was fixed upon Lucile, who stood with one hand pressed on her breast, looking at him with large, wondering, timid eyes. She had heard incidentally of this young man, she knew his failing—but had never seen him before. Val and Morton had been living in London for less than a month, their home for three years past being in Paris. Only in a vague way had Lucile thought of her grandfather's charge. She had felt a pang of sadness when once her mother had spoken of his habits. But she had pictured him as being repulsive—and now that she saw him, he was beautiful.

The lamp cast a golden halo about her, the rest of the room remaining in comparative shadow. For several moments utter silence prevailed. A strange look of ineffable tenderness and pity stole into the eyes of Lucile, as she looked upon that white, set, ravaged face. A swift sympathy agitated her, and her lips trembled, as she slowly and appealingly held out her hand towards Val. The young rake was shivering violently, his fixed gaze was full of terror, and presently he raised his arms with a pathetic gesture and shielded his face. Then he looked upon Lucile again, only to sink to his knees an

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instant after, sobbing like a woman. Morton, who had been standing just behind him all this time in the hall, sprang into the room, and, leaning down, drew his young master's head to his breast.

"Poor boy, poor boy." he murmured; and then he motioned to his granddaughter to go away at once. Lucile obeyed, after a backward look from the doorway at the tortured form of Valentine as he crouched on the floor, crying as she had never known a man could cry.

"Come, Val, come," murmured Morton, soothingly; "come to your room and tumble into bed. You want a good sleep."

A few hours later Morton sent for Dr. Stanton.

"Look here, Morton," said that impressive person, as he was laying aside his great coat in the hall, "I can't do anything for Valentine, and you oughtn't to send for me at this time of night. He's just like his father, and he'll have to die like him."

"But, doctor," replied Morton, "there's something strange going on in the boy to-night. He is trying not to drink."

"What's that? Do you mean he——"

"He threw a glass of brandy on to the floor after he had it against his lips, and prayed with me to be freed of the curse."

The doctor drew himself up and rubbed his eyeglasses vigorously with his pocket-handkerchief. He was interested.

"Has any unusual thing happened?"

"Well, there was a strange incident I might speak of. When Valentine came in to-night my granddaughter was here. The boy looked long at her, and then set to sobbing like a child. He has since talked of her eyes, and says they condemned him."

"Huh," grunted the doctor. "Did he ever see the girl before?"

"No."

"Is she beautiful?"

"Yes."

"Have her here to-morrow morning at eleven. There's nothing for me to do to-night. Remember about the girl."

The doctor put on his overcoat again and hurried away. The next day at eleven he appeared at the apartment again. Lucile, looking as fresh as a flower, was sitting on the edge of a chair, with her hands clasped in her lap, when Dr. Stanton entered. He scrutinised her closely.

"Ah, I see," he mused softly to himself, as he drew off his gloves. "The eyes are remarkable. They are like a nun's ought to be—innocent and thoughtful." Then, aloud to Morton, who stood by: "How's Val?"

"Very shaky, sir."

"Drinking?"

"He refused to touch anything till I forced him to. He was getting bad, sir, and I knew he couldn't stop all at once, so I——"

"That's right. Now, see here, Morton. I've got a scheme. This girl of yours can do wonders just now. Close Val's door. Now listen. I once had a friend, a young man who drank nearly as hard as Val. Drink had deadened every wholesome impulse in him—all but one—his love for his mother. He worshipped her, and she idolised him. For years she lived in despair of ever redeeming her son. Finally, one day, when he was comparatively sober, she appeared before him—drunk, insanely, terribly drunk. He looked on her, uttered a cry, and fell in a dead faint. From that moment he fought against liquor, and found the strength to conquer it."

The doctor looked towards Lucile, who was attentive and rigid.

"Val has no mother," he went on. "The principal difficulty that we have always had to contend with in his case has been that he was alone in the world and no one could make an effective appeal to his heart. We will not disguise matters now. My dear young lady, your innocent beauty has brought Valentine to a sense of his shame. Your presence has disclosed to him the hideousness of his own soul. By some mysterious process your eyes have pierced the shadows in which he lived, and released the pent up good there was always hidden somewhere in him. If I can make this shock a positive and lasting one, I will undertake to build the boy up physically. If I can produce an absolute horror of liquor in him, I can cleanse his body and make a sound man of him. Will you, my child, help me in this task?"

"Yes, sir," said Lucile.

"You heard my story of the man who was cured by seeing his mother in an intoxicated condition?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well—Valentine has no mother."

The girl was silent. Her grandfather, who had been nervously pacing the floor, and rubbing his hands together, stopped and lifted his head proudly.

"Dr. Stanton," he said, "I love Valentine Brant as well as if he were my own flesh and blood, but you ask too much when you——"

"I insist on doing what the doctor wishes," interrupted Lucile, rising tall and white, to her feet.

The doctor rose also, and, crossing the room, put his hand on Morton's shoulder.

"We can save Valentine if we do this thing," he said, in a serious voice. "His emotion of last night will not last. And if he starts on one more debauch he will die in a week. The girl is willing. I insist on trying the experiment."

"And must she really drink?" asked Morton, looking pitifully at the doctor.

"She must appear before Val at the right moment—intoxicated."

Morton groaned, and drew away, with his hands covering his face. The doctor turned to the girl and talked to her for some time in whispers. She listened attentively, her clear, pure eyes looking straight into his, her pale face serene and womanly. After a while the doctor crossed to where Morton stood, and said:

"Get me a bottle of brandy!"

The old servant shuffled away, and soon reappeared, bringing a bottle with him, and handed it, with a glass, to the doctor.

"Now, my brave little woman," said the doctor, passing over the bottle and glass to Lucile, "you go into the next room. In about half-an-hour I will call you. In the meantime, follow out my directions. Morton, you will come with me while I talk with Val."

Morton took a step towards his granddaughter, and would have snatched the brandy from her hands, but she held it away from him, and drawing herself up, said:

"I shall be very angry if you do not let me do what the doctor directs. I *will* do it;" and she turned and glided quickly into the adjoining room, shutting the door behind her. With a look of utter despair, Morton stared at the closed door, but permitted himself to be led away when the doctor put his hand gently through his arm.

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They found Valentine sitting, white and trembling, in a big arm-chair. He smiled wearily at the doctor, and held out his hand. The doctor looked carefully into his eyes and felt his pulse. While he did so, Valentine, in a nervous way, waved his disengaged hand at Morton, and said:

"Bring me my brandy! I can't—can't—oh this throat of mine—I'm dry—I'm choking! Get me the brandy!"

Morton and the doctor exchanged glances.

"It's the first time he's asked for it since last night," whispered the servant.

"Well, get it," replied the doctor.

Valentine's eyes were roaming about the room in a vacant way.

"Doctor," he said, after a moment, as he ceaselessly slipped a heavy ring on and off his finger, "I believe there's a heaven."

"Yes," said the doctor.

"Yes, I believe there is. I was sitting—somewhere—not long ago—a few hours ago—and I opened my eyes and saw—an angel. She was all white, with wings of gold—and she looked at me, doctor—like a dove. I must have been pretty near gone, don't you think so—to have seen an angel?"

"The angel you saw, Val, may have been an angel of the earth," responded the doctor.

Valentine drew his hand across his brow.

"Morton was there," he went on. "He let her in. She stood in front of me, and gazed at me—gazed—oh, her gaze! It burned me to a cinder, doctor. I am not so vile as the angel thought. I might have been better—if it were not for the—Morton, Morton, hurry with the brandy."

The doctor remained with Valentine for a full hour. Then he rose, and passed quietly from the room. In a moment he returned, holding Lucile by the hand. The girl's golden hair was hanging in a disordered mass over her shoulders. Her dress was torn open at the neck. She was as white as a ghost, her eyelids drooped heavily, and—she staggered. Her grandfather Morton turned and fled as she entered. The doctor led her directly to Valentine.

"Here, Val, is the angel you spoke of," he said, and then stood aside.

Valentine started up in his chair and fastened his gaze upon the girl before him. She stood in a limp, wavering attitude, holding towards him a bottle, which was about three-quarters filled.

"D'you ike bran'y?" she asked. "Here! Help y'rself. I've had 'nough."

Then, wheeling wildly round, she flung the bottle straight against a mirror, crashing it into splinters. This amused her, and throwing back her head she laughed.

"Pardon me," she said, suddenly becoming grave, and turning to Valentine again; "pardon me, but I always mus' break mir's w'n 'm intoxicated. It's a bad habit, but I mus' do it."

Valentine was on his feet, his eyes riveted upon the wavering figure before him. He was deadly in his pallor, and great dry sobs broke in his throat. Gradually he moved slowly round the room till he gained the chest of drawers, never moving his gaze from Lucile. He reached out his arm and opened a small drawer. Then he withdrew his hand and shut his eyes. There was a flash of steel, a click, and Lucile, with a scream, flung herself on him and struck out of his hand a revolver whose muzzle he had pressed against his temple.

"See! See!" she cried, throwing back her hair, and holding herself erect before him; "I am not drunk! It was acting! It was only a trick! Look at me; I am myself!" And, panting with excitement, she extended her arms wide apart, and in glance, attitude and word expressed her innocence. Valentine, pressing back against the wall, looked and looked upon the girl's face, and then, with a smile, sank to the ground unconscious.

* * * * *

"It was a miraculous cure," said Dr. Stanton, as he related the circumstances to a friend some months later. "After all, it takes a woman, a good woman, to drive out demons."

"Well, is the sequel of your story a happy one?"

"Of course. Val and Lucile were married in May."

"Lucky girl. They say Brant is worth half a million."

"Well, what of it? Lucile would be cheap at double that figure."

Annie Townsend.

The July Number of *Pearson's Magazine*, now on sale, commences a new volume. Now is the time to become a regular subscriber. Amongst the contributors to this number are H. G. Wells, Harry Furniss, W. L. Alden, Allen Upward, Georges Montbard, Claude Shepperson, and a host of other clever authors and artists.

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His doom had been spoken, and he was to die very soon. It was the kind-hearted, grey-haired physician who had told him "the worst," with a voice inflected by altogether unprofessional emotion; and as he recalled the scene Wilfred Devereux smiled grimly.

Wilfred Devereux had led a selfish and altogether useless life, but he had found the world fairly amusing until it had begun to bore him, and of late it had bored him profoundly; so he did not care so very much if he was "going out," as he phrased it.

He was to avoid excitement. The doctor had said so. Again he smiled, as he recalled this advice. For years his life had been a restless search after fresh distractions and excitement, and the sated worldling thought how entirely superfluous the counsel tendered by his physician had been.

Well, he was following out the prescription to-night, at all events, idly lounging in the luxurious little smoking-room.

He did not feel any penitence for his misspent years of manhood. No; since one summer afternoon long ago he had made up his mind to give up taking life seriously and to regard it merely as an opportunity for having "a good time," and now he had nearly spent his life; he had had the "good time," and felt reckless.

In a few days, weeks, or months—it did not interest him to speculate which—the men at the clubs would say to one another: "Hello, so I see poor old Devereux is dead," and the cousin who was to inherit his property would congratulate himself that there was anything left to inherit.

That was all. It might have been so different; but it was her fault. Was it quite fair, though, to lay the blame on his old love? Yes, yes; she had cast him off, she had sent him adrift, and his life's shipwreck was due to her.

But, despite these melancholy reflections, Devereux would not give way to gloom. On the contrary, he rose exchanged his smoking jacket for his dress coat, studied his list of engagements, and having ascertained that Mr. Pottinger-Jones expected him at a ball in Kensington, and that Lady Hildegarde had sent a card for her crush in Brook Street, he sailed out into the thronging street.

Once more Devereux felt a momentary pleasure at being a citizen of the brilliant world; and then he thought of the summer nights that were to come next year, when all this life would go on just the same, while he would be lying in six feet of earth somewhere away from the sound of the throbbing of the wheels, and the never-ceasing fall of feet on the London pavements.

He shuddered. After all, death was not pleasant to think about.

Again he forced his mind to thoughts of the past, and presently to such good purpose that he had forgotten Mrs. Pottinger-Jones and Lady Hildegarde, and was leaning on the parapet of the embankment, whither he had strayed, and was watching the sparkle of the stars in the dark river.

* * * * *

It was a sunny afternoon, and the fresh breeze blew from the sea. The tide was out and the long lines of foam were white against the blue. On the cliff edge, where the poppies flamed and the bees hummed in the thyme, stood a young man and a girl.

She wore a pink dress and a hat with a shady brim, and there was a look of pain in her beautiful eyes.

"Is this your final decision?" said the young man. "Have you no pity?"

"Pity? Yes, infinite pity; but I cannot marry you. Indeed—indeed, I cannot," she answered.

"I would do anything, anything," he pleaded, "to make you love me again. I know I am unworthy of you," he went on. "You are an angel, a goddess——"

But she only listened to his frantic praise with head averted.

"No, no, it is too late," was all she would vouchsafe in reply to his pleading. Her mingled expression of pain and scorn told the young man how he had been weighed and found wanting, and he clenched his hands in despair and mortification.

Then he drew himself up and spoke slowly and deliberately.

"Very well," he said, "since you cast me off I have nothing good left to live for. But don't think I shall waste my time in vain regrets, or that I shall ever come

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back to you. I will commit every sin and folly that can hide away the pain of this parting. I will squander my life as carelessly, as recklessly, as I can. I will never try again to be or to do anything pure or good.

"My only object henceforth shall be to forget you and all my foolish dreams, my belief in you and your love, my misplaced trust in womanhood, and all my sins shall be laid at your door. You may repudiate them, Mary, but my sins shall be upon your head. You could save me if you would, and you will not."

His face was flushed, and hers had grown angry and scornful.

Suddenly he softened again. "Don't you see, Mary, how you are spoiling my life?"

She made no reply. He asked her for a last kiss, for the flower she wore at her throat. But she refused both by silence and a downcast gaze. And so the romance of the young man's life had ended.

* * * * *

Devereux thought of all this as he gazed into the dark flowing Thames. Heavens! How well he had kept his word about squandering his life! But he did not blame Mary now.

"Mary is in town to-night," he reflected, as his cab bowled down the Embankment and came under the towers of Westminster towards Kensington. "I wonder if she has changed much, and if I shall come across her before I die."

And now he had reached his destination and was walking up a carpeted stairway, while the music sounded above him. He could not dance. The doctor had forbidden it, so he strolled aimlessly out of the ballroom.

Sometimes one seems to know by premonition what is to happen next. So it was with Devereux, and he scarcely started when the girl whom he had been so recently thinking about appeared before him.

The salt smell of the sea, the freshness of youth and the old impossible happiness seemed to come back to him as he looking into her beautiful, glorious eyes and returned her sedate greeting. She was no longer a mere girl, but she was very beautiful; indeed, little changed from what she used to be.

Silently she suffered him to lead her out on to the balcony.

"I have heard little of you since we parted," he said.

"And I have heard much of you."

"Nothing to my credit, I fear," he said lightly. "You see, Mary, I kept my word, and wasted my life as I foretold I should."

She made no answer.

"Do you think, Mary, that I was really so bad as you believed me to be?"

"As one grows older," she said gently. "I think one's creed grows less narrow. I treated you badly."

The last part of her reply was scarcely audible, but he leant forward and caught her hand, and held it lightly, while his frame thrilled with a feeling he had thought he could never experience again.

And she was thinking sadly of him whom she had cast adrift years before—of a young man, careless, worldly, perhaps, but with many possibilities in him of good, who had, however—she knew it only too surely—since chosen evil.

And she blamed herself bitterly for her self-sufficient righteousness, for her intolerance of what, viewed through the softening influence of time, seemed to be but very human weaknesses after all.

Her old narrowness of mind had been lost with fuller knowledge. The girl had led a sheltered life, and was ignorant of the world and its temptations. That woman who sat in the gloom of the balcony told herself that she had been wrong. That was all. But it had spoiled a man's life.

He was a weak man, to be sure, to have fretted over the loss of a girl's worthless heart; but she sat in the darkness conscious that she had made a great and grievous mistake.

And Devereux sat there as in a trance, drinking in every line of her face, dimly seen in the gloom, his heart filled unexpectedly with the sweetness of the only pure love it had ever felt.

Life had been a fever of late, a hot delirium, but he had found he was not worn out and weary of it as he had believed.

Neither spoke for a few minutes. At last Devereux said: "Mary, could you love me now?"

"Hush!" she said, "you must not speak so. I am married."

"Then I hope you are happy," he said very gently.

She was silent.

"Do you know, Mary, I am to die very soon?" he said.

"To die?"

"Yes. The doctors say I cannot last many weeks."

He heard her breath come faster.

"Mary, will you give me that kiss you refused me once?"

She bent forward and pressed her lips to his pale brow.

"Do you remember I asked for a flower. You did not give it to me. Will you give me one now?"

She took a white flower from her hair, and gave it him silently. Then he led her indoors, and returned alone to the balcony.

He sat down and crushed the flower she had given him to his lips, while its fragrance seemed to penetrate to his soul.

They found him there in the early morning—asleep, they thought—with a smile on his worn face.

But it was something else than sleep. For him "the fever called 'living'" was ended at last.

P. McArthur.

JUMBLE STORY COMPETITION.

No. 1.

Below will be found particulars of a new form of Competition which will take the place of the Picture Puzzle.

Four Prizes, one of £2 and three of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the opposite page, in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, and the first line is in its correct position.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumbled Story."

All competitions to be in by Monday, July 6th.

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BESSIE.

"You'll come again to-morrow?"

"If I can."

The man kicked a stone viciously.

He was so tall that he had to bend to look into those stitches.

She stood facing him now, a little thing with soft, fair wistful, upturned eyes.

"How dreadfully old he is looking to-night"—stitch, swiftly.

A man with hair streaked with grey, and a slight pipe.

The man smoked furiously.

"Just once more," he pleaded; "I shall be going away *once* more."

She looked at him astonished.

He took her little face between his hands and kissed it.

He did not often ask for kisses *now*.

The man (he was not so very old either) laid down his his neck, and held her close to him.

"Let me go. I shall be so late."

"I can't, besides——"

"Why didn't we meet three years ago?" A pause. "I meet you like this is very, very wrong."

"Rot!" the man ejaculated.

She was working, and her thoughts kept time to her notepaper.

"Good-bye, Dick."

"God bless you, my darling."

* * * * *

At the gate, by the cornfield, the man and woman met.

"I am going out shooting to-morrow," he said.

She opened her blue eyes bewildered.

"One must have a change," shortly.

"Yes," replied the woman sadly, "and I shall be glad and she sighed.

Oh! how she longed for a change. If only she could stooped like that three years ago. I wonder——" She meant never to see him again.

He was reading the paper and smoking his beloved wife's portrait which smiled down at him over his table.

A clock chimed three a.m. The man did not heed it as it slowly set.

He went into the library and locked the door; then he would be far away.

A knock at the door.

Going into the library she sat down.

"How he stoops! Always poring over those musty old stitch.

After that he began to write. Sheet after sheet of paper, and looked at her, opened his mouth to speak, but stoop, passed them; he half paused, then hurried on soon now."

"Bessie," he said softly.

"You look tired; you had better go to bed. I must see when you have gone. I can't help it, but I know that to to my gun and things; I shall be very late to-night."

"What ages we have been married"—stitch, stitch—while the late autumn sun flooded the room with colour She was very white; they were to say good-bye. She accidentally shot himself.

"You know, Dick, well enough," and the woman turned angrily now.

The woman lit a lamp and searched for some hair clustering round her almost childish face.

The man took her little arms and placed them round "more like thirteen years than three"—stitch, stitch—took a large parchment document out of his desk, and books, I suppose"—stitch, stitch. "I don't think he stopped, and took up his paper again.

It was a long sunny day, the late roses were heavy sleeping peacefully.

"No, no," he muttered, "better not," and he threw notepaper he covered, pausing at length to look at his sudden fear struck her. Still holding the paper in her commotion in the hall; he was coming home; she must go away for a little time, it would be easier to bear then.

"Bessie, dear," he said, "I have not made you very light, then he stole up to his wife's room. She was laid down her work and closed her eyes.

"Shooting!" She sat up and looked at him. "I read it over.

"It will be late when I come home; I want you to kiss the paper on the fire and watched it burn and smoulder with perfume, and the birds sang unceasingly.

"You are up very early," she said.

Yes, she would write to those friends up North, that talk just yet, and the light would hurt her eyes.

* * * * *

A man and his wife were sitting in the drawing-room, but sat smoking. At last, as daylight dawned, he took away. Then he took a fresh sheet and wrote five words yesterday.

"Besides what?" curiously.

Then he kissed her and went downstairs.

A hurried pretence of breakfast in the grey morning was dark and still; she was, oh! so glad she could not on it, and placed it with the parchment in a drawer.

She could not find any, she knew there had been some up his gun and examined it.

They did not see him; they were looking at each other. me, dear."

On a stretcher lay her husband, dead. He had didn't know you cared about it."

She opened a drawer. A folded parchment document, get the letter written quickly; she seized the sheet of paper.

The sun had set when she went slowly home. The house still held. On it was written:

"A change; perhaps he was weary too!"

"Then promise to come to-morrow?"

"I shall expect you. Good-bye, darling."

"No it is not rot, Dick, but I will try and come just happy, but I am going to try and make you happier."

"You are wanted at once," said a strange voice. A fingers, she followed the man out into the hall.

Bessie glanced mechanically at the paper which she and on the top a sheet of paper. There was a sudden wonder why I married *him?*" Stitch, stitch, stitch—away.

My Westar.

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By John K. Leys, *author of "The Tenth of June," etc., etc.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

Finding the Scent.

Kenyon could never explain to himself how it was that he neither felt surprised nor greatly shocked, when Shenstone's treachery was revealed to him. He had not really suspected that Katherine Dale's lover had been playing a double game. If Mr. Daunt had not warned him, Harold would have gone on placing implicit confidence in Shenstone, telling him everything that occurred, and taking his advice at every step. And yet a thousand minute circumstances—a little coldness on Shenstone's part, or a little undue warmth of tone, a certain slackness in maintaining the cause of the absent man, which subsequent protestations could not quite make up for—these, and such like things, had produced an unconscious impression on Kenyon's mind, which made him at once recognise that the attorney had told him the truth.

He merely nodded when Simpson whispered the name, as if he quite expected to hear it; and then turned the conversation into another channel.

Presently Simpson rose to go upstairs, and possessing himself of Kenyon's hand he began protesting with tipsy earnestness that the letter he had written to the bank was only intended as a joke, and "not meant t' injure you, Mishter Kenyon, in any shape or form." Kenyon assured the little vagabond that neither he nor anyone else would suffer on account of the disclosure he had made, and saw him led off to bed with much satisfaction.

When left alone Harold set about reviewing the situation in the light of this new fact which he had learned, and trying to find a reason for Shenstone's conduct. For more than two hours he sat there almost motionless, endeavouring to reason from the known to the unknown, and thinking what his next step ought to be.

The startling fact was that Shenstone had paid what was a considerable bribe—paid it, too, at a time when, as Harold knew, money was by no means plentiful with him—to check the prosecution of the search after Vere. There was no other conceivable motive for Shenstone's conduct. He wanted Vere to remain in seclusion. But *why?*

That was the question that haunted Harold's mind; and he could find no answer to it—that is, no satisfactory answer. A thousand wild surmises ran through his brain. Perhaps Shenstone was secretly in love with the Rector's daughter, and had murdered Vere to prevent the marriage taking place. Or perhaps he had been in love with Miss Unwin, and had beguiled her to the lonely spot in which the body was found, and shot her, out of jealousy. Or perhaps he was a relation of Miss Unwin, though he was too proud to acknowledge it, and had murdered Vere for his conduct to the girl, and had then taken the girl's life to conceal his former crime.

But these were all so many guesses in the dark, and afforded no guide for him in the future. On two points only he felt clear. One was that he would give Shenstone no hint that his double-dealing had been discovered. Simpson, no doubt, would hold his tongue for his own sake. The second point was that he would see Mr. Daunt at once, and be guided by him as to the next steps he ought to take.

Next morning, accordingly, he went straight to Mr. Daunt's office.

The old lawyer heard the news with a grim smile of satisfaction.

"We must find out something more about this man Shenstone," said he. "But tell me, in the first place, can you imagine any reason why he should have wished to injure you personally?"

Harold hesitated a moment. He remembered that he might perhaps have offended Shenstone by declining to allow him to overdraw his account at the bank without security. But then there was no likelihood that any manager who might have been sent down to Darnport in his place would act more leniently. And although Shenstone and himself were rivals in respect of Kate, Shenstone was the successful man, and had nothing to fear (as he must know very well) from his competitor.

"No," answered Harold; "I don't see any motive Shenstone could have had for injuring me."

"Can you think of any reason he could have had for requiring your presence in Darnport?"

"No."

"You had told him, I presume, that you meant to prosecute the search for Vere?"

"Oh, yes; he was helping me in the matter."

"Then I think we may assume, for the present at all events, that it was to hinder that search, to stop it, in fact, that he caused that letter to be written to the bankers, your employers."

"I am quite of the same opinion. But I can't see what I can do. I have advertised for Vere without any success. I don't dare to do so now, for fear that those who might have information to give may communicate with the police. I have not a ghost of a clue to guide me."

"And yet," said the lawyer thoughtfully, "a clue must be within your reach, or Shenstone would not have given himself so much trouble to get you put out of the way of finding it."

"Do you think so?" cried Harold.

"I am sure of it."

"But what can the hidden clue be? What is the point that Shenstone is so madly afraid of my touching?"

"Let me see. Didn't you say that Shenstone had done something to help you in your investigations?"

"Just a little. He called on Beaumont—or said he did—took him to the restaurant at which Vere had left his overcoat, and found that the waiter could not identify him as Vere's companion on the Tuesday evening—the night when Vere disappeared."

"Stop a moment. Did you propose, or did Shenstone, that he should undertake that job?"

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"Shenstone offered to do it himself," answered Kenyon, after a moment's recollection.

"Then *that* is the point to which we must direct our attention. But I'm afraid I must ask you to excuse me. I have an appointment for 10.30, and I heard the people come in some minutes ago. Come back this afternoon; for I am deeply interested in this affair of yours, and I mean to see you through with it."

Harold went off at once, as a matter of course, though he was much annoyed that the conversation had been cut short before Mr. Daunt had offered him a word of advice.

But he felt that he must in the first place become, for the time being, his own master. He might be sent back to Darnport at any moment; and it would not do for him to be hampered in that way. He went to the bank, therefore, and told Mr. Bonnington privately that he had discovered the person who had accused him of negligence, and had ascertained beyond a doubt that the letter had not been written in good faith.

Mr. Bonnington stared when he heard this, and naturally wanted to know more. Kenyon, however, did not feel himself at liberty to go into particulars; and the banker had known Kenyon so many years that he was content to say no more, but accept his word for what he had stated.

Kenyon then begged his old friend to procure him leave of absence for three or four weeks, assuring him that at that season of the year, Mr. Green, the cashier at Darnport, was perfectly capable of transacting the small amount of business which was coming in, and adding that he could not retain his situation unless his request was granted.

Mr. Bonnington was at first little disposed to grant what he felt was an unreasonable demand; he told Kenyon that he was a fool; that it is easier to resign a post than to find a new one, and so on. But in the end he said good-naturedly that he could not see him ruined, and that he would manage to send someone to take his place at Darnport for the next three weeks.

"I will never forget your kindness, sir," said Harold, "and you may rely on it, that if the—the painful private business I am engaged in—is finished before the three weeks are over, I will not delay an hour in returning to my place at Darnport."

Having rid himself of this obstacle, which might have proved a formidable one, Harold left the bank. It was then only a quarter-past eleven; and he felt that he could not trouble Mr. Daunt again till after three—nearly four hours to wait. And it seemed to Kenyon that he could not spend this time better than in ascertaining whether Beaumont had really seen Vere on Tuesday evening, or whether Shenstone had lied when he reported that he had ascertained that Beaumont had not been in Vere's company that night.

So, without pausing to reflect, he walked rapidly to Mr. Beaumont's office.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CHECK.

"I HOPE you will forgive my troubling you a second time," said Kenyon to the young lawyer; "but I am anxious to ascertain when you last saw my friend Launcelot Vere."

Beaumont sat looking at his visitor a few seconds without speaking.

"When I last saw Launcelot Vere?" he repeated—"I—really—I can hardly say, at this distance of time. When a man has a good many engagements he can't remember them all."

"You had an appointment with him, you remember, for the evening of the day on which he was last heard of," said Harold. "May I ask if you saw him at all on that day, Tuesday?"

Mr. Beaumont shook his head.

"You feel sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure."

"You can't imagine any reason why he did not keep his engagement with you?"

"No, indeed, I can't."

"Thank you," said Kenyon rising. "By the way," he added, "do you mind telling me if a Mr. Shenstone called on you lately?"

Kenyon stopped short.

Something—a nervous tremor, or a too apparent exercise of self-control—in the lawyer's face had brought back the vague distrust which he had before felt about this man. And in the same instant Harold stood aghast at his own folly. For if Beaumont was not to be trusted, the only result of putting these questions must be to arouse his suspicions. And it was a quick, suspicious glance he threw at his questioner, as he replied abruptly:

"Shenstone? No! Don't know any such name. Good-day."

"What an ass I have been!" cried Kenyon to himself, as he left the office. "How can I find out whether this fellow is speaking the truth?"

The answer suggested itself readily. He must confront him with the waiter from whom he had received Vere's overcoat.

Harold at once jumped into a hansom, and in a few minutes was deposited at the "Cock Pheasant."

"Forbes," he said, going up to the stout, sandy-haired waiter, "can you come with me for an hour or two?"

"I'm afraid it's impossible, sir. After hours, I might—"

"That won't do," interrupted Harold. "But it is still early in the day. Can't you find a substitute? I may only want you for half-an-hour or forty minutes; and I will pay you well for your trouble."

Still Forbes looked doubtful.

Kenyon slipped a sovereign into his hand. This wrought a marvellous change in his demeanour.

"Luncheons will be on immediately, sir," he said, "they're beginning now. But from three to five there ain't so much doing. I might be able to get away for an hour, or even two hours, about that time."

Kenyon was impatient at the delay, but there was no help for it; and he thought he might as well spend the time there as anywhere else. He ordered luncheon, therefore, with a bottle of wine; and waited as patiently as he could, until Forbes announced that he had got an hour's leave, and was ready to accompany him.

By this time it was half-past three. The weather was raw and foggy; and in the narrow passage into which Beaumont's office opened, it was almost dark.

"You remember the gentleman who left the overcoat you gave me?" said Kenyon to his companion, when they had reached the spot.

"Cert'nly, sir."

"And do you think you would recognise the gentleman who was with him that night?"

"Yes, sir; I feel pretty certain I could."

"Then I must tell you that this gentleman" (pointing to Mr. Beaumont's name on the door-post) "denies that he was with my friend that evening, and I want to find out whether he is telling the truth. Can you make some excuse for going in and speaking to him?"

Accident rendered it unnecessary for Forbes to tax his inventive faculties. At that moment the office-door opened, and Beaumont himself came out. Kenyon had just time to step back a pace or two, leaving the waiter standing right in the lawyer's path.

Forbes stared hard at him, but Beaumont did not apparently notice it.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the waiter, "but I think you were with a gentleman as left his overcoat at our place, the 'Cock Pheasant,' about three weeks since."

Beaumont started and stared at the speaker, his face growing paler each moment.

"Not I, my man. You've made a mistake. I know nothing about it," he said roughly.

Forbes fell back, and the lawyer's eyes wandered to the corner where Kenyon was standing. Harold, on his part,

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felt ashamed of the part he was playing, necessary as he believed it to be. He would have been glad if Mr. Beaumont had not noticed him; and he expected to receive a look of indignant scorn, perhaps a few contemptuous words, from the man whose word he had doubted.

But it was a very different expression from contempt that rested on the lawyer's face—it was *fear*. Swiftly his glance travelled from Harold to the waiter and back again. There could be no doubt in his mind that Harold had brought the man there on purpose to see whether he had spoken the truth, when he denied that he had been in Vere's company on that Tuesday evening.

He seemed about to speak, then apparently he changed his mind, turned his pale face away, and crept along the passage towards the street.

"There goes a guilty man, if ever there was one!" said Harold to himself.

Forbes nodded his head emphatically.

"That's the man, sir," said he. "I'll take my oath on it. I wasn't quite certain till I heard him speak, but now I know I'm right. He may deny it as much as he likes."

Harold told Forbes he had no doubt he was right, gave him an additional half sovereign, and dismissed him.

But on going to Mr. Daunt's office to report progress, Harold found that a disappointment awaited him. Mr. Daunt had been called away on important business, and would not be back at his office that day. He had left a message for Kenyon, explaining this, and adding that he should expect to see him in the morning.

This was particularly provoking. Harold felt that he was approaching a crisis. Beaumont knew that his falsehood had been discovered, and he must know that Vere's friends would naturally ask—What was the reason for that falsehood? If he was concerned, directly or indirectly, in Vere's disappearance, he had abundant warning that denials would no longer serve his turn. Harold was convinced that it would be a fatal mistake to give him time to prepare his defences. He ought to be pressed at once.

Kenyon pondered the question for some moments, and then decided to see Beaumont again, and point out that it was certain that he was the last person in whose company Vere had been seen, and put it to him plainly that suspicion of a very black kind must rest upon him, if he did not at once tell all he knew about the missing man.

Ten minutes took him back to Mr. Beaumont's office. The door was shut and locked, and no light shone from within. Harold was alarmed at this, for all the other offices on the staircase were open, and clerks were coming and going busily in all directions. Yet there was no notice of any kind posted on the door, to intimate that it would be opened again that night.

Harold waited for more than an hour—waited till every other office was closed, and all the clerks had gone home. But Mr. Beaumont's door remained closed.

Next morning Kenyon was there before ten. The lawyer's office was still shut. There was still hope, he thought. Beaumont had evidently not very much practice. He might be in the habit of coming down late; and the clerk—there was but one—might have fallen into idle habits. He might put in an appearance at any moment.

But every minute this hope became fainter, till at last, when twelve o'clock struck and no one had appeared to open the door, it died away altogether. It was plain that the last man who had seen Vere alive had fled, the moment he was recognised, and had carried with him the secret of Launcelot's life or death.

CHAPTER XX.

The Trail is Recovered.

"My dear fellow, what is the matter with you?" cried Mr. Daunt, starting from his chair, as Harold came into his room. "Surely you are ill."

"Nothing is the matter," answered Kenyon, "except that I am now convinced that poor Vere has met with foul play and I—ass, blind, insensate fool that I am——"

"You are white as a sheet, and—here, drink this," said the old lawyer, pouring out a glass of port from a decanter he produced from a bookcase. "Now, tell me what has happened."

"I have hardly the patience to tell it. In order to find out whether Beaumont had really been with Vere up to the time he disappeared, I went to inquire of—whom do you think? Beaumont himself. He denied that he had seen Vere at all that day. I had sense enough to see that he was lying, however; and I took the waiter who had noticed Vere and his companion at the restaurant, to see whether he could identify Beaumont. Do I make myself clear?"

Mr. Daunt nodded.

"Unfortunately I had not given the waiter proper warning, so that, in speaking to Beaumont, the man allowed him to see that it was known, or at least suspected, that he had lied when he denied being in Beaumont's company that night. I was foolish enough to go to the office myself, instead of simply giving the waiter proper directions; and so Beaumont saw us together. In that way he got full warning, and now—he has bolted."

"Bolted! Surely not!"

"His office door was shut before closing time last night, and it has not been opened again."

"But that looks serious! It looks as if——"

The old man stopped, staring at his visitor in silence.

"As if he had murdered your friend, and fled in a panic as soon as it became known that he and Vere had been seen together"—that was the thought that was in Mr. Daunt's mind, although, out of consideration for Kenyon, he did not utter it. And Kenyon knew well that that was the old man's meaning.

"Can anything be done?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"If he were going to leave the country, he must be on the Continent by this time," said the lawyer, as if speaking to himself. "And in any case, we can't apply for a warrant. There isn't evidence enough against him, by a long way. No," he added, after a pause, "the law can't help us. But that is not to say that we may not help ourselves. Do you go and discover this Mr. Beaumont's private address. Hunt it up from his landlord, his clerk, his—anybody you can think of. When you've got it, come for me, and we'll call there together. Meantime I will make inquiries, and find out something about Beaumont—his past history, his character, and so on. It is just possible that I may hear something that will throw a ray of light on our path. Stay a moment, here is my card with my private address—29, St. James's Square. Can you dine with me to-night, at seven? Very happy if you can. Then we can compare notes, and try to decide on our future plans. Good-day, for the present."

Kenyon's task was by no means so easy as it looked. There are thousands of men in London, respectable men, too, many of them, of whom it might be said that no one but their laundresses are acquainted with their private addresses. They spend their days in their chambers or their offices, their evenings at their clubs; they have no occasion to tell their friends, or anyone, the exact locality of their bedrooms. And Kenyon told himself with a sigh that if Beaumont was the sort of man he feared he was, it was more than likely that he would be extremely reticent on that point.

But Harold had the whole day to work in, and he did not despair of success. He applied first of all to the agent of the landlord, whose name and address he soon ascertained. But the house agent could not help him. The only address Mr. Beaumont had given was that of an hotel at which he had been staying when he took the office. Then Kenyon tried the policeman on the beat, and then the officials of the Law Institution, but with no better success.

Then a bright idea occurred to him. He knew that

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junior clerks are generally on friendly terms with the lads employed by neighbouring firms, so he made advances to the office-boy in the office next to the one Mr. Beaumont had occupied, and obtained from him, without much difficulty, the name and address of the lad who had acted as Mr. Beaumont's clerk. The boy's name was Herbert Joyce, and he lived in Fetter Lane.

Kenyon went there at once, and found Joyce at home—a gawky, sullen-faced lad of seventeen.

"I have been at the office," said Kenyon, "and I find that Mr. Beaumont is away. Can you tell me his address?"

"No; he didn't leave no address."

"Can you tell me when he will be back?"

"No; he didn't say when he'd be back."

"Can you take a letter from me to him?"

The boy shook his head.

"Come. You must know his private address."

"No, I don't."

Harold was convinced that the lad was telling a falsehood. But how was he to make him speak the truth? Harold tried coaxing, bribing, even threatening him, all without any effect. It was evident that Beaumont had so worked upon the lad's fears or cupidity—it was impossible to believe that he had touched his affections, even supposing that Herbert Joyce had affections to be touched—that he would not betray the secret of his master's private address for any reason short of torture. For nearly an hour Harold intreated, bullied, and tempted him in vain. The boy would admit nothing; and at last Kenyon was forced to leave him without attaining his object.

By this time it was getting late in the afternoon, and Harold had not advanced a step. He wandered back to Beaumont's office, without any expectation that it might be open, but thinking that it was barely possible that some one of the clerks in the adjoining offices might have learned from Joyce some idea of the place his master lived in.

A hansom cab was waiting at the door of the house as Harold entered the passage; and when he left, half-an-hour later, after making many unsuccessful inquiries, the same cab was loitering about the street.

Harold, thinking that he might as well give up the hopeless quest, signalled to the cabman; and the cab drew up to the kerbstone.

"St. James's Square, Notting Hill," said Harold, preparing to enter the vehicle.

"Beg pardon, sir, but I have a regular job here. The gen'lm'n's very late to-night. He may be gone. Perhaps you would kindly look behind you in the passage, and see if his office is dark. Name of Beaumont." Kenyon started.

"The office is shut up," he said quickly; "and I am anxious to see him. Did you say you were in the habit of driving him?"

"'Most every night of my life, sir."

"Just take me to his house."

"Can't, sir. Don't know it. I only drove Mr. Beaumont to the corner of Sussex Street, in the Edgware Road."

"Drive me there, then," cried Harold, jumping into the cab.

"Now, it all depends on whether Beaumont had an *alias* for professional use," said Kenyon to himself. "If he had not, I will find his rooms, though I should have to ring every door-bell within a mile radius of the spot where I am set down."

It was dark when the hansom came at last to a standstill.

"That's the street the gentleman always turned down, and I *fancy* he lives there," said cabby, as he pocketed his fare.

Kenyon gave him an extra shilling for this hint, and began his tour among the houses which exhibited an "Apartments" card, with some hope of success.

And Fortune, tired of persecuting him, and retarding his efforts, smiled on him at last.

A trim maidservant answered his stereotyped inquiry with: "Yes, sir; but he's not at home."

Harold was delighted. He had not expected to find the fugitive at his fireside; and the fact of his absence went to show that he was on the right track

"Has he been long away?" he asked.

"Since yesterday afternoon, sir."

"Who is that, Jane?" said a gentle voice in the passage.

"Gentleman inquiring 'bout Mr. Beaumont," said the girl.

"He forgot to leave his address," said the landlady, coming forward.

Miss Bruce—that was the lady's name—was not by any means a typical London landlady; which was explained by the fact that she was not a Londoner. She was a mild-tempered, unsuspicious, garrulous creature, as Harold perceived at the first glance.

She asked him to walk in, and proceeded to exchange with him regrets that neither of them could satisfy the other's desire to know Mr. Beaumont's address. Kenyon purposely lingered, and encouraged her to talk, throwing in now and then a question about her rooms. Finally she insisted upon showing him some apartments which she had to let; and it occurred to Kenyon that he might as well take them. It would be much cheaper than living at an hotel; and he might learn something by becoming an inmate of the house.

"Have you any other lodgers, Miss Bruce?" he asked.

"None but Mr. Beaumont at present, sir, and he is so quiet you wouldn't know he was in the house. He never has company, I may say; not for six months—well there was one night, but he said the poor gentleman was suddenly overcome, and as he went away quietly and made no disturbance, I didn't say anything about it."

"Very good of you to overlook it, I'm sure," said Harold politely. "Mr. Beaumont had a bachelor party, I suppose."

"Oh, no, sir. The young gentleman and he had been dining out at a restaurant he said; and the gentleman had taken a little too much wine."

"When was that?" asked Harold quickly.

"Well, sir, let me see. It would be about three weeks ago—three weeks last Tuesday. Dear me, sir, there isn't anything wrong, is there?"

"No. But tell me about that young gentleman. He is a friend of mine, and I want to know when he came here, when he left, who went with him, and in fact all you can tell me. It is not mere curiosity that makes me ask you this—the truth is," Harold added, "I am sorry to say my friend has left a young lady he was engaged to be married to, and I am anxious to find him. Don't be afraid on his account. I am *his* friend, not the lady's. But I want to bring him back to her. I intreat you to tell me all you can."

Thus adjured Miss Bruce summoned her handmaid, and the sum of what Harold learnt was this:

That Mr. Beaumont had brought home with him, about eight o'clock on the evening in question, a gentleman whose description corresponded exactly with that of Vere. On his first coming in the strange gentleman seemed sober enough, but when the maid-servant went into Mr. Beaumont's dining-room, shortly after nine, he was asleep in his chair, and breathing very heavily. They had had nothing to drink but some coffee, and a little brandy and soda-water, so it must have been at dinner, Miss Bruce argued, that he had over-indulged himself. At any rate a cab came for him a little after nine, and he was so far gone, then, that Mr. Beaumont had almost to carry him into the street—he could hardly move one foot before the other; and the lady who was in the cab had to get out and help him in.

"The lady!" cried Harold, starting to his feet.

"Yes, sir; the gentleman's sister, Mr. Beaumont told us."

"Do you know where they drove him to?" asked Harold in a fever of excitement.

Miss Bruce shook her head; neither she nor her servant was able to say a word on this all-important point. From the description given of the lady, Harold had little doubt that she must have been Miss Unwin. That was the last piece of information he could elicit from either Miss Bruce or the servant; so, telling Miss Bruce that he would occupy his rooms next day, he left the house, and made the best of his way to St. James's Square.

(To be continued.)

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RESULT OF No. 6 COMPETITION.

Of the papers sent in for The Brain Gymnasium, No. 6, not one was wholly correct. Mr. J. R. Trail Hill, of 3, Merchant Street, Peterhead, heads the list with a total of 9½, and the next is Mr. J. Moir, Blackhall, Pitmuxton, Aberdeen, to each, therefore, has been awarded a cheque for One Guinea.

Consolation prizes have been sent to the competitors whose names appears below.

H. J. Beards, Wellington Road, Bilston, Staffs.
Miss Panting, 3, Westover Gardens, Westover Road, Wandsworth Common.
W. Buchan, 9, Romford Road, Stratford, E.
W. C. L. Caird, 12, Franklin Street, South Tottenham, N.
Mrs. M. H. Farnell, 4, Sea View, Haylake, Cheshire.
W. S. Cool, 28, Thirsk Road, Lavender Hill.
G. Redford, 26, Beacon Street, North Shields.
J. Jones, 7, Rhondda Street, Mount Pleasant, Swansea.
E. J. Grapper, 57, Franklin Street, Derby Street, Salford, Lancs.
Mrs. M. Mennie, 99, Queen Street, Peterhead.
S. A. Howe, Lowfield Board School, Sheffield.
G. D. Taylor, 28, Ernest Street, Rhyl.
W. A. Coult, St. Michael's Boy's School, Wyndham Road, Camberwell.
Miss Way, Curraghmore, Shanklin, Isle of Wight.
A. M. Trivess, 4, Graham Road, Southsea, Hants.
W. J. Lavers, Fortescue Hotel, Mutley, Plymouth.
W. H. Lomas, Rose Villa, Stockport Road, Ashton-on-Lynn.
Miss D. Patton, The Links, Ascot.
C. R. Senior, 585, Abbeydale Road, Sheffield.
A. Dawson, Sunny Bank, Frodsham, Cheshire.
Miss G. Erskine, 2, Chapel Street, Peterhead.
S. Richardson, Wycar House, Bedale.
S. Hotton, Springwell House, near Chesterfield.
W. Dawson 23, Hewitt Street, Hightown, Manchester.
J. Wilson, Tyne Terrace, Whiteabbey, near Belfast.
R. H. Monnickendam, 24, Oppidans Road, Primrose Hill.

KEY OF NO. 6 COMPETITION.

Key No. 51.

G R I M
R A C E
I C O N
M E N D

Key No. 52.—Corporations.

Key No. 53.

46½½min. from time *A* starts.

Key No. 54.

This paragraph appeared in *Short Stories* dated May 16th, page 489 second column, second paragraph.

Key No. 55.

Hill. Value 125.

Key No. 56.

The poodle is a quadruped that's principally hair,
Its twelve to fourteen inches long and very nearly square,
It reminds me of a lady's muff that's bolstered up on pegs,
It's very lengthy whiskers and abbreviated legs.

Key No. 57.

S P E R M A P H O R E
I N T E R M E N T
F E A R F U L
F R A U D
I N K
G
T E A
L U M P Y
B A N E F U L
A M O U N T I N G
F R I G H T F U L L Y

Key No. 58.

E Q U E S
M U F T I
P I O U S
H Y E N A

Key No. 59.

Among the best anagrams sent in are:
Son, my coat is ragged.
My acting dogs arose.
Go, aid my strong case.

Key No. 60.

17 k's and 60 f's.

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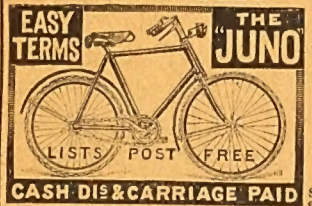

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Every Initial and Monogram of two letters kept in stock. Monogram of two letters, 1/1; Initials, 10d. each, post free. Apply—

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with **full natural perfect Bust,** obtained by a simple, inexpensive and harmless self-treatment, approved and recommended by the medical profession. Success guaranteed. For particulars free, send stamped envelope in confidence to Madame "B. J." Oriental Toilet Co., 87, Strand, London.

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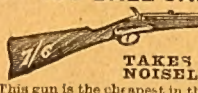

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(Mention this Paper.)

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permanently and absolutely by an entirely new and harmless self-treatment, total destruction guaranteed. Particulars free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope. Prof. F. T. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

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DROWNED NEAR HIS OWN DOOR.

"*Why, that's Tom, my husband!*" cried the poor woman; "I was expecting his ship to come in almost any day. He'd been gone a year on a voyage to South America, and now here he lies dead on the sand. Oh, God! what shall we do, what shall we do?"

The ship had foundered during a tremendous gale off the South Coast in the winter of 1879, and the body of this sailor (by the irony of fate) had been cast ashore *within* half a mile of his own cottage. Such an incident is dramatic; it appeals to the imagination and excites pity. But are there not thousands——? What's the use of any more preamble? Read this:

"In the spring of 1884"—so runs a woman's letter—"my health began to slip away from me, as a dream does when one awakes. The first sign of what was happening was a feeling of languor and fatigue that I could not account for. My mind was full of small worries; and things that I commonly took no notice of assumed an importance which did not, I knew, properly belong to them.

"My appetite was bad and what little I ate gave me an intense pain at the chest which seemed to go through to the back between the shoulder blades. Not infrequently the pain in my stomach was so keen, and held out so long, as to double my body up as one folds a napkin. Following this there would come a sense of sinking as if the very ground were failing beneath me.

"Being unable to digest nourishing food, my strength vanished day by day until I had barely power to walk feebly about. All ambition to work was gone from me. With the least exertion I would lose my breath and my heart would throb and palpitate so that I was alarmed lest some one of these attacks might be fatal. Often I would sit for an hour or more, powerless to move hand or foot.

"During all this time I was troubled with other distressful symptoms which I will only allude to in few words. There was a belching of wind or gas from the stomach, foul and disgusting, which sickened me dreadfully; an aching head, sallow skin, a feeling of chilliness even on slight exposure, sleeplessness, mental anxiety and increasing exhaustion.

"I was treated by a doctor, and used many medicines suggested by others—all to no purpose. The disease seemed to be seated beyond the power of human skill to uproot it. I speak now of a time four years after I was first attacked. While in this wretched and apparently hopeless condition I read of what Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup had done in like cases. I procured this medicine from Mr. Gee, the chemist at Whitehaven. After taking it for a week I felt marked relief, and when I had used three bottles I could eat any kind of food; my strength gradually returned and in a short time I was well and strong as ever. This may sound almost incredible to some, but it is the simple truth."

The above letter is from a lady residing at Distington, near Whitehaven, Cumberland. For personal reasons she requests us not to publish her name at present, yet her illness and cure, as stated, are known to all in her neighbourhood. We append a note which explains itself:

"I can vouch for the accuracy of the above statement. I have known the lady for the past five years. (Signed) Charles Clarke, Postmaster, Distington, October 10th, 1894."

For one moment now let us consider two or three important facts. This lady suffered for four years. Read her letter again, and see what this fact means. Pain, loss and sorrow filled that dreary period. Yet she was finally cured in as many weeks. Had she known of Seigel's Syrup and used it at the outset she would have been cured at once. Not a day, not an hour, of all those four years but the Syrup would have set her on the road to health, had she used it to drive out her disease—indigestion and dyspepsia. Still, she suffered, and faced death, with help right at her elbow. *Alas! she knew it not.*

Now do you see why so many of us are like poor Tom, who was drowned at his own door?

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